TOWARD A RECONCILIATION OF VIRTUE AND FREEDOM IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

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TOWARD A RECONCILIATION OF VIRTUE AND FREEDOM IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

TOWARD A RECONCILIATION OF VIRTUE AND FREEDOM IN
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Ever since the Enlightenment, modernity presented itself as a story of human emancipation and as a culture of freedom. In the history of the modern thought, freedom has been the master principle of morality and the foundational premise of politics for varying philosophical approaches. Philosophically, this theme has been most emphatically developed during the Enlightenment, and most clearly spelled out by Kant. Politically, however, the idea of freedom culminated in the great Western revolutions, and acquired its formal manifestation in the declarations or bills of rights. On the other hand, there is the older, classical tradition of virtue. Some scholars argue that the most fundamental difference between the ancients and the moderns lies in their respective focus on virtue and freedom. However, recently, in the midst of Western modernity, there has been a revival of the classical virtue tradition. The opposition, then, is not only between historical epochs (e.g. between the ancients and the moderns), but is a conflict inside the contemporary political philosophy. This dissertation aims to provide insight into this tension by concentrating on a number of major political thinkers advocating the primacy of freedom, such as Rawls, or the primacy of virtue, such as MacIntyre. After a critical evaluation of 'aretaic minimalism', 'liberal virtue' theories, and Aristotelian communitarianism in contemporary political philosophy, it is argued that the 'ethics of the good' articulated by Taylor offers a stronger reconciliatory standpoint open to an aretaic or ethical understanding of freedom.

Keywords: virtue, freedom, good, MacIntyre, Taylor

ÖZET

ÇAĞDAŞ SİYASET FELSEFESİNDE
ERDEM VE ÖZGÜRLÜĞÜN TELİFİNE DOĞRU
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Aydınlanma'dan bu yana modernlik kendini bir insani kurtuluş öyküsü ve bir özgürlük kültürü olarak suna geldi. Modern düşüncenin tarihi serüveni içinde özgürlük muhtelif felsefi yaklaşımlar için ahlakın ana ilkesi, siyasetin temel öncülü oldu. Bu tema felsefi olarak en kuvvetli biçimde Aydınlanma çağında geliştirilmiş, en açık şekilde de Kant tarafından telaffuz edilmiştir. Siyasi olarak ise özgürlük fikri büyük Batı devrimlerinde zirveye çıkmış, insan ve vatandaşlık haklarına ilişkin bildirgelerde de formel bir hüviyet kazanmıştır. Aynı süreçte, ahlak ve siyaset düşüncesi daha eski bir gelenekten, klasik 'erdem' geleneğinden kısmen uzaklaşmıştır. Öyle ki, kimi düşünürlere bakılırsa, modernler ile antikler arasındaki temel fark özgürlük ve erdem ilkelerine yönelik vurgularında görülür. Fakat yakın dönemde ve yine modernliğin tam ortasında klasik erdem geleneğinin uyanışına şahit olduk. Öyleyse burada yalnızca tarihi dönemler (antikite-modernite) arasındaki bir karşıtlıktan değil, çağdaş siyaset felsefesine içkin bir gerilimden söz etmek gerekir. Bu tez çağdaş siyaset felsefesinde Rawls gibi özgürlüğe öncelik tanıyan düşünürlerle, MacIntyre gibi erdeme öncelik veren bazı önemli düşünürlere odaklanarak söz konusu gerilimi aydınlatmayı amaçlamaktadır. Özgürlük ve erdem arasında zorunlu, içkin bir gerilim var mıdır? Birini diğeri ile uzlaştırmak, telif etmek mümkün müdür? 'Asgari erdemler' fikri, liberal erdemler ve Aristocu cemaatçilik gibi yaklaşımların eleştirel bir tahlilinin ardından, Taylor'da gördüğümüz türden bir 'iyi etiğinin' erdemli ya da ahlaki bir özgürlük anlayışına açık güçlü bir telif çerçevesi sunduğu ileri sürülmektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: erdem, özgürlük, iyi, MacIntyre, Taylor

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: MODERNITY, FREEDOM, AND VIRTUE

I

Modernity as a philosophical category has variously been defined as the philosophy of consciousness, the metaphysics of subjectivity, the metaphysics of immanence, the new gnosticism, or even as the second overcoming of gnosticism. The essence of modernity as a political philosophical problem, however, can best be captured in relation to the idea(l) of freedom because, ever since the Enlightenment, modernity has presented itself as a story of human emancipation and as a culture of freedom. In fact, given the anthropocentric turn that is deeply entrenched in modern civilization, freedom, as an attribute of subjectivity, has been the core element in the self-understanding of modernity. The Hegelian definition of history as the progress of man to higher levels of freedom and rationality reveals this self-understanding succinctly.

In the long history of modern thought, the idea of freedom has been the master principle of morality and the foundational premise of politics for varying intellectual traditions. Expressed either as a corollary of social contract and consent theories or as a component of natural rights theories, freedom constitutes what Hirschmann calls the "obsessional core"[1] of Western modernity. It is true that, even in pre-modern times,

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[1] Nancy J. Hirschmann, "Eastern Veiling, Western Freedom?" in Fred Dallmayr (ed.), *Border Crossings: Toward a Comparative Political Theory*, (Lexington Books, 1999).

freedom, or liberty, has been conceived as a legal status -- under patrimonial rules, for instance, it was granted by the monarch as a legal right. Free cities, autonomous communities, and free persons as opposed to slaves, were all conceivable in pre-modern eras. Alternatively, it was a matter of metaphysical speculation about free will. What is truly new in modernity, however, is that

> for the first time in history freedom was seen from the standpoint of the individual…Now, it was a quality of life; not an instrument but a good in itself, a quality of man and of society which enabled moral personality, moral development, self-realization. A mature man is a free man…Society is not just to tolerate individuality, to allow it because it can do no other. It should foster it.[2]

This strong turn to freedom as a property of the individual has been institutionalized, and acquired its concrete or, in a Hegelian vein, determinate, form through the great Western revolutions that paved the way for the expression of freedom as the highest aspiration of humanity. That is, the idea of freedom culminated politically in the American and French revolutions and acquired its institutional and formal manifestation in declarations or bills of human rights. The doctrine of human rights is still a predominant feature of Western democracy today.

Philosophically speaking, however, the idea was developed during the Enlightenment and was most clearly been spelled out by Kant. The Kantian idea of man as an autonomous, self-determining being represents the best philosophical articulation of modern concentration on freedom. Kant developed his notion of freedom in a number of important works, giving it a central place in his comprehensive system. His concern with freedom was powerfully motivated by the challenge posed by the naturalism of his day. Newtonian mechanistic cosmology had problematized the very notion of freedom and made such ideas as moral responsibility and moral agency highly suspect, given the deterministic quality of

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[2] Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the 19th Century*, (Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 25-29.

nature. "If all events in the world can be experienced only under the category of causality, what room is there for freedom?"[3] This was Kant's guiding question.

Kant answered this question with what we may call a 'two-step radicalization'. He radicalized both the Cartesian ontology and Rousseau's idea of self-prescription. Seeking the 'transcendental conditions' of our practical (or moral) experience, he posited freedom as the fundamental postulate of morality and placed it in the secure plane of the *noumenal*. Here he was in fact repeating the Copernican revolution. Although part of our nature was causally determined, embodied, and empirically affected, we had another part that was morally free and rational. This part, our *noumenal* self, was the true locus of freedom. In this way, Kant conceptualized freedom in metaphysical terms and vested moral freedom "in a kind of metaphysical agency."[4] Here the stark opposition between our empirical and *noumenal* selves points to the radicalization of Cartesian duality. There is another step, however, which radicalizes, this time, Rousseau's legacy. Simply put, for Rousseau, those are free who are capable of obeying their own self-prescribed law. Kant articulated the same idea within his practical philosophy: Those are free who are capable of obeying universal moral law prescribed by reason alone. Freedom is possible so long as we are capable of purifying ourselves of our contingent desires, empirical motivations, particular interests, and natural impulses and so long as we are motivated *purely* by the dictates of what Kant calls 'the categorical imperative', that is, by universalizing the maxims of our actions, and by treating others always as ends in themselves (never as means or instruments for an ulterior end). "Only by doing its duty," as given by the categorical imperative, "for the sake of duty, does the will become truly self-legislative."[5] Freed from contingent causes, the moral subject legislates for itself the proper course of action, but does this through rational self-reflection, which, in the end, provides the content of the categorical imperative.

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[3] Norman Melchert, *The Great Conversation* (McGraw-Hill, 2002), p. 464.

[4] David Ingram, "Introduction", in David Ingram (ed.), *The Political* (Blackwell, 2002), p. 6.

[5] Paul Franco, *Hegel's Philosophy of Freedom* (Yale University Press, 1999), p. 11.

In the final analysis, two elements stand out in this formulation that have been highly significant for the later course of modernity: reason (or rationality) as the engine of morality and politics, and self-legislating, spontaneous subjectivity[6] as the locus of moral freedom. By centerstaging these elements in his own manner, Kant was in fact developing his idea of freedom against the naturalistic conception of morality and freedom, which constitutes another powerful theme in modernity, best exemplified by Hobbes and Hume, according to which our natural being is not an obstacle to, but the very premise of our morality and freedom. In addition, and as a natural corollary to this, reason can never be the arbiter of our passions -- it cannot legislate our duties -- but can only show the efficient way of satisfying our wants: *reason is the slave of passions*. Put differently, "our desires are taken as given for moral reasoning" and "are beyond the arbitration of reason."[7] Construed in this way, freedom amounts to nothing more than the unimpeded pursuit of one's naturally given inclinations and desires. This was clearly antithetical to Kant's idea of freedom, which is predicated upon a rational will, totally free from any determination coming from nature. But Kant's treatment of freedom, though decisive for modernity due to its radicalization of the Cartesian turn and its repetition of the Copernican revolution in the realm of morality, is not the only approach to the issue. Another way to trace the progressive diversification of the idea of freedom can be found in Berlin's seminal essay on liberty. In his *Two Concepts of Liberty* Berlin[8] distinguishes between a negative conception of freedom and a positive one. The former reflects the absence of external constraints and points to a protected private domain unobstructed by anyone else, whereas the latter refers to the ideas of self-mastery (or self-rule), autonomy, and self-determination (or self-realization). Embarking with this distinction, Berlin suggests, one can analyze the various

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[6] Robert Pippin, *Modernism as A Philosophical Problem* (Blackwell, 1999).

[7] Charles Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society* (Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 74.

[8] Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford University Press, 1969).

conceptions of freedom in the history of ideas. This function of this distinction, however, is not only for analytical purposes. Berlin also advances it for critical purposes, that is, to be able to criticize some very common understandings of freedom. In Berlin's account, positive conceptions of freedom are suspect due to their political implications. The ideas of self-mastery, self-direction, and autonomy undergirding positive notions of freedom tend to divide selfhood into two hierarchical domains: higher and lower, authentic and inauthentic, or autonomous and heteronomous. The problem here is not simply the emergence of a 'divided self' presupposed by these positive ideas of freedom. The real problem, or danger, according to Berlin, lies in the possible political implications of the idea of plural selves in one person. Once it is accepted that there is a self higher than the phenomenal or empirical/natural one, appeals to a trans-individual conception of self, in the form of a tribe, a state, or a nation, become very easy. This, in turn, opens the door for coercion and the restriction of liberties in the name of a higher self construed as a collective personality. Obviously, Berlin's target here is the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century that justified gross hindrances of individual liberties in the name of some higher aspiration represented by the state, the nation, or the proletariat.

In contemporary political philosophy, and especially among liberal and libertarian theorists, this understanding of negative freedom has been very influential and has taken a variety of forms. In Hayek and Nozick, for example, one finds strong emphasis on a negative understanding of freedom. According to Hayek, for instance, "Freedom refers solely to a relation of men to other men, and the only infringement on it is coercion by men." Freedom is one's "independence of the arbitrary will of another."[9] Nozick comes to a similar point by invoking the primacy of rights-based liberties. On his account, the domain of freedom is defined by the rights of individuals, or, more properly, by the formal liberties

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[9] F. A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960); cited in Chandran Kukathas, "Liberty", in R. E. Goodin and P. Pettit (eds.), *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy* (Blackwell, 1998), p. 540.

of self-ownership.[10] Rawls also pays tribute to freedom, but in a somewhat different way. Instead of taking a side in the debate over the negative and positive conceptions of freedom, he follows the idea that any notion of liberty should include both the negative and positive aspects of liberty. In this view, freedom is a "single triadic concept" comprising (a) the agent or agents (of freedom), (b) constraints, restrictions, and interferences (the negative aspect), and (c) actions or conditions of character or circumstance (the positive aspect).[11] In addition, by assigning lexical priority to basic civil and political liberties in his system, Rawls recognizes the centrality of freedom in modern politics.

II

The modern concern with freedom has sometimes been described as a fundamental contradiction of the ancient understanding of morality and politics. Phrased differently, the primacy of freedom has sometimes been taken to be the fundamental difference between the "ancients" and the "moderns." In his life-long quest to revive interest in the classical tradition, Leo Strauss, for instance, assigns priority to virtue as the central theme of classical political philosophy. Virtue, or human excellence, is the axial concern of the Socratic search for the best life. As a corollary to this, for the ancients, "The state exists to promote human happiness, understood as the life in which the highest human faculties are

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[10] Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Blackwell, 1974). There is a considerable amount of controversy in contemporary literature on whether liberalism and libertarianism are theories based, first and foremost, on a principle of liberty, or rather on a principle of equality. Although many libertarians are keen on the idea that their theory is in principle a theory of liberty, there are counter claims. For an interpretation of both liberalism and libertarianism as equality-based theories see Kymlicka (2002). For an argument stressing the centrality of liberty as the core value of liberalism see Freeden's (1996) morphological account of ideologies.

[11] Chandran Kukathas, "Liberty", in R. E. Goodin and P. Pettit (eds.), *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy* (Blackwell, 1998), pp. 534-535.

cultivated."[12] Political philosophy, in turn, is equivalent to the quest for the best political order, the order most conducive to the practice of virtue.

Modernity, on the other hand, represents a progressive split from this concern with excellence, or a conscious break with classical understanding. This cost of this break has been, according to Strauss, a narrowing of the horizon of political philosophy, which now, lowering the standards of inquiry, aims at a *modus vivendi* among willful individuals, rather than revealing the objective standards of morality and the virtuous life. It is no accident, then, that Strauss locates the first crisis of modernity in the thought of Rousseau, who "attacked modernity in the name of two classical ideas: the city and virtue, on the one hand, and nature, on the other."[13]

In a similar vein, Voegelin identifies the classical understanding with the quest for the "right order of soul and society." Taking inspiration from what he calls "the Platonic-Aristotelian paradigm of the best polis,"[14] Voegelin "believed that order and disorder in society and history are rooted in the order and disorder embodied in persons according to their success or failure in pursuing an authentic life."[15] Political analysis, in turn, "is concerned with the therapy of order."[16] Compared to this Platonic-Aristotelian world-picture, modernity represents, according to Voegelin,[17] the attack on virtues, and a new kind of gnosticism, resulting in "egophanic revolt." Gnosticism is, in fact, the code word for his indictment of modernity. In Voegelin's sense of the term, modern, secular Gnosticism (or radical immanentization, as he sometimes prefers to describe it), stands for all attempts at

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[12] Shadia B. Drury, *Leo Strauss and the American Right*, (Macmillan, 1997), p. 107.

[13] Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (The University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 253.

[14] Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (The University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 15-21.

[15] Kenneth Keulman, *The Balance of Consciousness: Eric Voegelin's Political Theory* (The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), p. 170.

[16] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, p. 19.

[17] Eric Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism* (Regnery Gateway, Inc., 1952).

creating an alternative, perfect order on earth depending upon the power of knowledge to transform reality.[18] Voegelin cites all the mass ideologies and movements of the modern world under this category. These movements, and modern gnosticism in general, represent

> an attempt to alter the inevitable human perspective, from participant in a whole not of one's own making (seeing from the inside) to observer and participant, having access to some Archimedean point. Ideologies require this assumed perspective, because they suppose a closed system about which they have knowledge. Gnosticism is a closing of the soul and the construction of an alternative reality.[19]

The ultimate consequence of this gnostic turn is modern totalitarianisms, according to Voegelin. Despite his hash criticisms of modernity and his espousal of the classical tradition, however, Voegelin acknowledges that the classical concern with the best polis is inadequate given the complexity of the modern condition. As he states, "The Platonic-Aristotelian paradigm of the best polis cannot provide an answer for the great questions of our time -- either for the organizational problems of industrial society or for the spiritual problems of the struggle between Christianity and ideology." Yet, he adds that the basic situation of political science remains the same: "Today, just as two thousand years ago, *politike episteme* deals with questions that concern everyone and that everyone asks. Though different opinions are current in society today, its subject matter has not changed."[20]

This fundamental difference between the ancients and the moderns can be identified also in terms of the primacy of the good or the right. As Rawls explains in his *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy:*

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[18] For a comprehensive analysis of Voegelin's understanding of gnosticism in comparison to other treatments of the topic see Gregor Sebba, *The Collected Essays of Gregor Sebba: Truth, History, and the Imagination* (Louisiana State University Press, 1991).

[19] Ted V. McAllister, *Revolt Against Modernity: Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin, and the Search for a Postliberal Order* (University Press of Kansas, 1996), p. 23.

[20] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, p. 21.

The ancients asked about the most rational way to true happiness, or the highest good, and they inquired about how the virtuous conduct and the virtues as aspects of character … are related to that highest good. … Whereas the moderns asked primarily, or at least in the first instance, about what they saw as authoritative prescriptions of right reason, and the rights, duties, and obligations to which these prescriptions of reason gave rise.[21]

This stress on virtue did not remain confined to classical times, however. Apart from Strauss and Voegelin, there is a growing interest in the classical virtue tradition among students of moral and political philosophy today. This renewed interest in virtue tradition is largely the consequence of attempts at finding an alternative ethics and politics to the Kantian and utilitarian traditions. In other words, virtue tradition has been revived mainly against what came to be called the "legalistic turn" in ethics and politics, represented by the deontological and consequentialist theories, with their emphasis on the rightness of actions, rules, and obligations, rather than the quality of mind and character. Against these two traditions, virtue thinkers take inspiration from the Platonic-Aristotelian conception of *arete*, or excellence. In this sense, virtue ethics culminates in a "systematic re-exploration of the Aristotelian model."[22] As Cottingham points out, the basic assertion of this model is that "guided by the excellences of intellect, we can set about training ourselves so as to develop excellences of character." The principal claim of the virtue tradition is that "strengthened by the instilling of the right habits, and guided by a rational vision of the good life, we shall be able to actualize the potentialities we are born with, and achieve an optimally successful and enriching life -- the life of *eudemonia* or happiness." Among contemporary philosophers, Alasdair MacIntyre in particular, through his role in current debates in moral and political philosophy, represents almost a sea change in the understanding of the virtues and their relevance for modern man.

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[21] John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy* (Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 2.

[22] John Cottingham, *Philosophy and the Good Life* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 24.

III

To summarize what has been said so far: Freedom constitutes the guiding theme of modernity as a political philosophical category. Philosophically, this theme was most forcefully developed during the Enlightenment, and most clearly spelled out by Kant. Politically, however, the idea of freedom culminated in the great Western revolutions and acquired its formal manifestation in declarations and bills of rights. On the other hand, there is the older, classical tradition of virtue. Some scholars argue that the basic difference between the ancients and the moderns is the difference between their respective focus on virtue and freedom. However, recently, in the midst of Western modernity, there has been a revival (or an attempted revival) of the classical virtue tradition. It seems, then, that the opposition is not only between historical periods (between the ancients and the moderns), but is a conflict within contemporary political philosophy. My thesis aims to investigate this conflict by concentrating on major thinkers championing the primacy of freedom and the primacy of virtue. In the end, I want to explore whether there is a way to reconcile these two major streams of thought. Are these two lines parallel, perpendicular, or overlapping? Is there a necessary, inherent tension between freedom and virtue? Can they be reconciled at all?

The reason I am asking these questions is not simply the factual coexistence or, more properly, the historical coincidence of these two traditions within contemporary political philosophy. In fact, the coexistence of the classical virtue tradition with what we can call the primacy-of-freedom approaches is nothing but the clearest manifestation of deeper, substantive questions within contemporary political philosophy. The classical virtue tradition never paid special tribute to democracy. On most occasions, it was even hostile to democracy on the grounds of the classical search for excellence. Most proponents of virtue were elitists seeking the rule of the best. Can, then, as Slote rightly asks, there be a

democratic theory of virtuosity?[23] Similarly, the classical ethicists have always tied their theories to what White calls a "strong ontology"[24] and an objectivist account of the human good. Given the incommensurability of goods in the increasingly complex societies of late modernity, however, in what way can concern with virtue be incorporated into a politics of freedom, or in what way can virtue be reconciled with freedom?[25]

Therefore, the question that I would like to address in my thesis is whether there is an opposition or tension between freedom and virtue. Is it possible to cultivate a kind of virtuosity, which is capable also of addressing the modern turn to freedom?

The first culmination of this problem can be followed in Hegel's critique of the Kantian understanding of moral freedom. Briefly, Kantian ethics, according to Hegel, is nothing more than an "empty formalism," unable to yield the content of our moral orientations. Insensitive to the concrete context of inter-subjectivity in ethical life, Kantian autonomy posits morally free subjectivity, under 'ought' claims, against causally determined, embodied personality, under 'is' conditions. Hence, Kantian ethics cannot ground the morally virtuous character in a determinate fashion. In Kant, virtues are like heroic acts against the ordinary way of the world; the subject assumes a heroic stance against contingency, against his own inclinations, and against the dictates of circumstance; he dutifully stands against *is* with *ought* claims. In a fully developed ethical life, however, virtues are like habits, and part of custom, which is itself the reflection of the spirit. In a

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[23] Michael Slote, "Virtue" in R. E. Goodin and P. Pettit (eds.), *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy* (Blackwell, 1998).

[24] Stephen K. White, *Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory* (Princeton University Press, 2000).

[25] Drury posits the problem tellingly: "Freedom and virtue are both genuine goods of equal worth that enhance human life. However, the tragedy of political life is that it is impossible to choose both of these goods in full measure. A society must choose which one will be fundamental; it must order them hierarchically. If we value virtue above all else, then we must be willing to forgo a great deal of the freedoms we now take for granted. If we choose freedom, as liberal societies do, then we must be willing to put up with a certain degree of vice. It is impossible to have both perfect freedom and perfect virtue at the same time" (1997: 109).

sense, virtues become one's second nature -- the great Aristotelian ideal; there remains no gap between one's duties and inclinations, and virtues turn into one's character dispositions.

Sometimes such a picture of an ethical life is evaluated as too good to ever become true. Hegel's characterization of the fully developed ethical life and the virtues in it presents difficulties, especially in terms of freedom. This is because the virtuous character, in Hegel's 'ethical life,' acquires an unreflective proximity to his duties that seems difficult to reconcile with the notion of autonomy, or subjective freedom. In his *Philosophy of Right* Hegel asserts:

> The ethical, in so far as it is reflected simply in the natural character of the individual, is virtue. When it contains nothing more than conformity to the duties of the sphere to which the individual belongs, it is integrity. What a man ought to do, or what duties he should fulfill in order to be virtuous, is in an ethical community not hard to say. He has to do nothing except what is presented, expressed and recognized in his established relations.[26]

Understanding the way in which Hegel addresses this question requires further elaboration. For the time being, however, it can be said that, as the Hegelian opus emphatically puts it, in the dialectical unfolding of the spirit, ethical life already incorporates its prior modes. That is, ethical life already incorporates the element of subjective freedom within itself. In a sense, Hegel resolves the question with recourse to his philosophy of history. Franco explains this with reference to Hegel's comparison between the Greek ethical life and the modern one. Whereas Greek ethical life, because it has not been reborn through the struggle for subjective freedom, remains at the earliest stage of subjective freedom and preserves a sort of natural ethicality, "modern ethical life has, in fact, been reborn from the historic struggle through which subjective freedom has developed itself. Modern ethical life precisely does incorporate the rights of personality and moral subjectivity that are the fruits of this historic struggle."[27]

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[26] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*. S.W. Dyde (trans.) (Prometheus Books, 1996 [1821]), p. 159.

[27] Franco, *Hegel's Philosophy of Freedom*, pp. 231-232.

This point can, I think, be better put, without appealing to the philosophy of history, by borrowing from something noted by Hauerwas in another context. "To emphasize the idea of character [as Hegel does in the above quotation] is to recognize that our actions are also acts of self-determination; in them we not only affirm what we have been but also determine what we will be in the future." Accordingly, character denotes also "what is in some measure deliberate."[28] Alternatively, as Dallmayr makes clear, ethical life, or virtuous character for the purposes of our discussion, in Hegel, means the "concrete coincidence of goodness and subjective will." Although in the Kantian conception of morality there is a conflict between subjective will and goodness, Hegel seeks the possibility of reconciliation between the two. Ethical life combines subjective will and objective goodness, but in a manner that "relies on subjective intention and conviction," ushering in a new kind of freedom, "namely, actualized freedom … that finds in self-reflection its conscious will and through action its concrete reality."[29]

Another way to raise or detect the question about the proper relation between freedom and virtue is to look at republican critics of the negative idea of freedom. At this point, Arendt's critique of liberalism readily comes to mind.[30] Just as Hegel criticizes Kant's idea of moral freedom and virtuosity predicated on the inner realm of subjectivity, Arendt criticizes liberalism for removing freedom from the political realm. In her words, "liberalism, its name notwithstanding, has done its share to banish the notion of liberty from the political realm."[31] This critique is in fact embedded in a more comprehensive critique of modernity. Although freedom has philosophically been articulated in modern times -- it was not among the cardinal virtues in ancient times -- modernity, in Arendt's view, represents a progressive narrowing of freedom, its progressive retreat into private

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[28] Stanley Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue* (University of Norte Dame Press, 1981), pp. 49-52.

[29] Fred Dallmayr, *G. W. F. Hegel: Modernity and Politics* (Sage Publications, 1993), p. 117.

[30] It should also be mentioned, however, that in a number of important works Skinner delineates a republican vision of freedom. See especially his *Liberty Before Liberalism* (1998).

[31] Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (Penguin Books, 1977), p. 153-155.

solipsism -- in Berlin's words, a retreat into the *inner citadel*. In radical contrast to the ancients, who conceived of freedom as a function of practical political life (or what Arendt called *vita activa*), and as a property disclosing itself only through participation in the life of the *polis*, in later periods and especially in the modern era, freedom came to be conceived either as a matter or property of the will or as part of an economic activity. As a result, freedom lost its proper location, namely, the public realm of politics. Political activity, for Arendt, should be considered as the highest point in the hierarchy of human activities. Having its own intrinsic value, political agency is the only means by which human beings can transcend their finitude and overcome, in a sense, mortality. Public life, practical engagement, active political life, and human interaction in the political realm are the fundamental facets of such agency. Paying tribute to the older republican tradition, Arendt states, "Freedom as inherent in action is perhaps best illustrated by Machiavelli's concept of *virtu*, the excellence with which man answers the opportunities the world opens up before him in the guise of *fortuna*." Thus, for Arendt, freedom is possible only with public virtuosity.

What Arendt achieves in her arguments is a rebuttal against the modernist metaphysics of subjectivity locating freedom in the will, or in private inwardness. Against this, she situates freedom in a kind of public virtuosity. This, of course, generates some clear difficulties for contemporary liberalism. In particular, the Aristotelian emphasis on the intrinsic value of political life creates trouble from a liberal perspective. This is because, in a liberal view, even this neo-Aristotelian stance is a particular conception of the good, and at least for a Rawlsian liberal, particular conceptions of the good should never be evaluated from a public standpoint. The modern primacy of private life in contemporary societies does not seem in line with Arendt's prioritization of active political life. For most of the people in contemporary liberal democratic societies, private life is the most appropriate realm for the pursuit of particular conceptions of the good. For this reason, the elevation of active public life to a superior position, if it is adopted and promoted from a public standpoint, seems contrary to liberal sensibilities. Nevertheless, without public virtuosity, genuine freedom never comes into being, according to Arendt. Another way to understand

the stated question about the proper relationship between virtue and freedom is to look at the neo-Aristotelian resurgence in moral and political thought. The most outstanding name in this context is Alasdair MacIntyre. In his seminal *After Virtue* and later works, MacIntyre tries to develop a sort of modern Aristotelianism predicated upon a comprehensive critique of all Enlightenment theories of ethics. Two features of the Enlightenment are essential in order to grasp the fundamental failure of the Enlightenment project of developing a secular morality. One is the loss of 'teleological functionalism' in moral considerations; the other is the absence of a concept of human nature to ground an ethical view of the human being. Especially through its rejection of teleology, modernity deprived itself of the insight that 'man' is a functional concept and "to be man is to fill a set of roles each of which has its own point and purpose." The modern mode of moral reasoning, on the contrary, takes man as an "individual prior to, and apart from all roles."[32] What this amounts to in the end is the loss of "any concrete context allowing for character formation, that is, for a shared experience exceeding the realm of privacy and private individual preferences."[33] In this way MacIntyre presents a critique of a conception of freedom predicated solely on privacy and the "emotivist" self of contemporary society. More specifically, he is criticizing the liberal outlook in morality and politics. According to MacIntyre, liberalism's professed neutrality toward competing conceptions of the good necessitates a subjectivist outlook in moral thinking. As such, he is in fact targeting not only liberal political philosophy, but also, more generally, the wider public culture of liberal societies in which what he calls 'emotivism' and value-skepticism dominate. In addition, he seems to concur with Arendt on the value of republican tradition due to its attempt at building a richer notion of liberty that is compatible with a teleologically

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[32] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), p. 59.

[33] Fred Dallmayr, *Critical Encounters: Between Philosophy and Politics* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), p. 196.

construed vision of virtues.[34] MacIntyre also affirms the centrality of character formation, and virtue, as tied to shared understandings of particular communities.[35]

Hauerwas shares the same concern in his works and develops an ethics of character from a theological standpoint. In his *Vision and Virtue* and other related works, he derives ethical reflection toward virtue and character and toward an ethical-political freedom. According to Hauerwas, the reason the ethics of character and virtue has come into a certain degree of disrepute is that character is sometimes interpreted as a "limiting aspect of our human freedom" and having character is sometimes thought as "being set in one's ways, inflexible, or unbending." Against such a view, and incorporating elements from the Kantian understanding of autonomy, Hauerwas affirms the significance of self-determination and agency in the very process of character formation. He emphasizes, "Man's capacity for self-determination is crucial if he is to have character." Moreover, for Hauerwas, freedom is itself a virtue:

> "Freedom or the autonomy of the self is not a status to be assumed but a task to be undertaken…To be free is the successful embodiment of the descriptions we choose as morally true…Freedom is genuinely a virtue, a determination of the self, that protects us from being at the mercy of the moment."[36]

Another name that deserves consideration in this context is Charles Taylor. Indeed, a careful examination of Taylor's evolving opus reveals that his is also an attempt toward an ethical-political freedom combining action and character, and harmonizing freedom and virtue. Like Arendt and MacIntyre, Taylor launches his criticisms against both the

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[34] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 241-243.

[35] Despite MacIntyre's severe criticisms against Kant, it seems that contemporary deontological liberals, rather than Kant himself, are the ones who do not take virtues into consideration, although more recently, under communitarian attacks, they have begun to defend what they call liberal virtues. These liberal virtues are fairly different from the Aristotelian ones, and are limited to with the virtues of civility, non-discrimination, and public reasonablesness. For an excellent attempt to reconcile Aristotle and Kant, see Nancy Sherman's *Making a Necessity of Virtue* (1997). For an articulation of a kind of liberal virtue theory, a liberal mode of Aristotelianism, see Martha Nussbaum's *The Fragility of Goodness* (2001).

[36] Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue*, pp. 48-66.

modernist metaphysics of subjectivity, on the one hand, and the resulting public culture of liberal societies, on the other. In Taylor's characterization, the definitive feature of liberal societies is 'atomism' in social philosophy. This social philosophy misrepresents the relation between the individual and his community because, contrary to the liberal understanding, there is a constitutive relationship between the two. Individuals' self-understandings are necessarily constituted in relation to a social, linguistic, communal matrix. This is a quasi-empirical or sociological consideration with a Hegelian emphasis. Hegel's emphasis on the concrete inter-subjectivity of ethical life, as opposed to what he calls Kant's empty or abstract formalism, seems to have a direct influence on this consideration. In fact, when Taylor discusses the topic he proposes what he calls "the social thesis" against the atomism of certain liberal theories and, in formulating this thesis, he profoundly builds on the Hegelian opus. For Taylor, social theories affirming the social nature of man point to the fact that man can develop his characteristically human attributes only within a certain form of society in which autonomy, rational self-determination, and self-directedness are cultivated. Embracing this social thesis, Taylor criticizes contemporary liberal theories due to their insensitivity to the fact that even autonomy requires the cultivation of a certain form of society and a certain conception of the good.

In his criticisms of atomism, Taylor seems to agree with Arendt's rebuttal of the liberal or, more generally, modern, constriction of liberty into the subjective domain. Taylor's statement in his *Sources of the Self* that "a society of self-fulfillers, whose affiliations are more and more seen as revocable, cannot sustain the strong identification with the political community which public freedom needs,"[37] shows his appreciation of public-oriented freedom in moral and political life. In his theoretical intervention into the liberal-communitarian debate, Taylor underlines the merits of the republican ideal of self-rule and participation as the essence of freedom. Thus far there is shared terrain between Arendt's concern and Taylor's project. Taylor moves further, however, and focuses on the

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[37] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 1996[1989]), p. 508.

character domain of virtue as a necessary corrective for negative freedom. In other words, Taylor does not remain at the point where Arendt stands, and is not satisfied with the republican conception of liberty as self-rule through active public life alone. His critical examination of the negative notion of liberty and his construal of an *Ethics of Authenticity*[38] steers the concern with freedom toward an ethics of virtue rooted in self-transformation sensitive to higher and lower forms of freedom. In his famous analysis of negative liberty, Taylor shows the inadequacy of conceiving freedom simply in terms of external constraints. Exclusively defending the most extreme form of negative freedom, according to Taylor, is mostly a strategic choice aimed at avoiding the most extreme forms of positive freedom, namely, totalitarian control as a way of collective self-rule. For whatever reasons, however, adopting such an extreme form of negative freedom amounts to abandoning and repressing our post-Romantic intuitions, "which put great value on self-realization."[39] Contrary to the naïve moral psychologies of utilitarian thinkers, specifically Hobbes and Hume, obstacles to freedom can be internal as well as external. So construed, freedom also requires some internal conditions, such as being true to one's authentic ends, self-control, and being able to critically examine one's motivations. With this emphasis on internal conditions, Taylor points to the importance of character formation and self-transformation for genuine freedom. The principal concern for Taylor here is the liability of freedom to possessive lifestyles and extreme anthropocentrism. In Dallmayr's words, "Using authenticity as a code word for the ambivalence of modern freedom, Taylor acknowledges that, under the impact of modern subjectivism, freedom easily deteriorates into self-centeredness and self-indulgence."[40] Against this condition, Taylor tries to promote a carefully balanced view of freedom. Addressing, but at the same time questioning, modern post-Romantic sensibilities, Taylor asserts that the subject can never be the "final authority on the question whether his desires are authentic, whether they do or do not frustrate his

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[38] Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Harvard University Press, 2000).

[39] Charles Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[40] Fred Dallmayr, *Dialogue Among Civilizations: Some Exemplary Voices* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 227.

purposes." Accordingly, one cannot be the final authority on the question of whether or not he is free. This, however, does not mean that there should be an external social or public authority to decide on this matter. This is in complete contrast to our post-Romantic understanding that one's true realization is original; "each person has his own original form of realization." Giving the role to public authority in this matter destroys "other necessary conditions of freedom." Instead, we should settle for the fact that "the nature of a free society is that it will always be the locus of a struggle between higher and lower forms of freedom. … Through social action, political change, and winning hearts and minds, the better forms can gain ground, at least for a while. In a sense, a genuinely free society can take as its self-description the slogan …: the struggle goes on – in fact, forever."[41]

IV

As the above sketch delineates, the search for a proper relation between freedom and virtue seems to be a characteristically modern, or contemporary, question. The primacy of freedom in the self-understanding of modernity is manifest in various orientations in modern political philosophy. In fact, almost every modern ideology has affirmed the centrality of freedom and justified itself as a better way of actualizing freedom. Recently, however, in the midst of modernity, there has been a revival of interest in the classical virtue tradition. This is, I think, a clear indication that the virtue-freedom question is an issue within contemporary political philosophy. What is shared and what is not between freedom and virtue? Where is the shared terrain, if it exists, and what are the possible flash points between freedom and virtue? Alternatively, are they essential for each other, mutually indispensable? In terms of possible wider implications of this topic, what kind of a politics would it be that reconciles and takes into genuine consideration both freedom and virtue?

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[41] Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 78.

In order to explore various complications of this question in contemporary political philosophy I will proceed in four main steps. In the first chapter I will focus, in the case of John Rawls's political liberalism, on aretaic minimalism in political philosophy. In the second chapter I will focus on a number of mostly liberal attempts to go beyond such minimalism on the basis of alternative conceptions of liberal virtues. Then I will move to two relatively more coherent and philosophically more developed attempts at retrieving the tradition of the virtues and an ethics of the good in the works of Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor, respectively.

CHAPTER 2

ARETAIC MINIMALISM IN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY:
RAWLS'S DISPOSITIONS

Subtle and complicated works of first-rate political philosophy usually give the impression that they are treating almost all the critical themes in their field in a relatively integrated way. In many instances, this is of course not only an impression but corresponds to a fairly large measure of truth. No doubt, within the bibliography of contemporary political philosophy the work of J. Rawls assumes such qualities. All the critical issues of political philosophy find some measure of treatment in his works: freedom, equality, solidarity, justice, stability, legitimacy, order, and virtue. However, in order to be able to comprehend how exactly these delicate issues are elaborated and appreciate how densely they figure in these works, one needs to adopt a more discerning and discriminating approach. Accordingly, in this chapter I will examine and critically assess the way Rawls treats the question of the right and the good in terms of his broader conception of practical reasoning. This will help us to see the contours of what I would like to call 'aretaic minimalism' in political thinking.

2.1. Aretaic Minimalism in Practical Reasoning

Although the right and the good as a distinction sounds fairly contemporary, it is more appropriate to see it as a contemporary manifestation of a much older bifurcation in moral and political thought. In fact, these two terms could be seen as referring to two alternative grounds or principles structuring the whole domain of morals and politics since antiquity. The right and the good stand, respectively, for the juridical and goal-seeking interests of ethics and politics, alongside its interest in self-cultivation.[1] These three ethical interests can be seen as three paradigms rooted in different, yet sometimes fairly overlapping philosophical traditions. Here the goal-seeking paradigm is characteristically associated with the greatest names of ancient philosophy and Athens, namely, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle; whereas the juridical paradigm takes us back first to Jerusalem, through Stoic interest in natural law, to Kant as the best representative of the juridical take on morality. But already in Athens and more strongly in the Stoics what is referred to above as the ethics of self-cultivation could be discerned as another major orientation. And although today this bifurcation with respect to structuring principles is usually treated with reference to the distinction between the right and the good, alternative pairs are also on offer: deontological and teleological, the moral and the ethical, the imperative and the attractive, ethical formalism and material ethics.

Now, as in many other issues in contemporary political philosophy, the question of the priority of the right or of the good has become a structuring reference in contemporary political philosophy with Rawls's well-known work *A Theory of Justice*. Rawls's principal reservation about the good stems originally from his indictment of utilitarianism, as the then-prevailing ethico-political vision of modern politics, due to its inability to do justice to

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[1] For an impressive overview of the adventures of this distinction throughout the history of ethics see Abraham Edel, "Right and Good," in Philip Wiener (ed.), *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, vol. 4 (New York, 1973), pp. 173-87.

our considered judgments or convictions about the inviolability of certain rights, irrespective of whatever prospects one can envision about the attainability of a higher good at the expense of those rights. Rights are not subject to 'felicific calculus.' They have a distinctive normativity of their own, irreducible to considerations of well-being or welfare. As Rawls declares on the very first page of his magnum opus: "Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. For this reason justice denies that the loss of freedom for some is made right by a greater good shared by others."[2]

But this is only one aspect of a larger defect in the utilitarian prioritization of the good. Another problematic aspect is the monistic conception of the good promoted by utilitarianism in its mainstream forms. "Beginning with Greek thought." Rawls notes, "the dominant tradition seems to have been that there is but one reasonable and rational conception of the good," and "the classical utilitarianism … belongs to this dominant tradition."[3] In fact, it is because utilitarianism condenses the field of the good into a monistic conception that the felicific calculus or considerations of greater benefit seem capable of packing together diverse pursuits and conceptions of the good in a single overall evaluation. All goods or intimations of the good are ultimately comparable, which is certainly an idea with powerful policy implications, at least from a bureaucratic or, let us say, physiocratic point of view. But, given the diversity and irreducible plurality of the good, this monism remains wide of the mark in its evaluative ambition.

Interestingly for our present concern, even as he admonishes utilitarianism, Rawls underlines his concern with the good; or, in other words, in one single act Rawls indicts utilitarianism and rehabilitates the good. Given this background, Rawls's opus can be seen as a majestic attempt at giving to the irreducible plurality of the good its due within a framework of rights. But just how such an attempt is worked out, how it manages the good

[2] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard Belknap Press, 1971), pp. 3.

[3] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005 [1993]), p. 135.

in its diverse manifestations, and what ideals of practical reasoning it fosters rightly continue to spawn a rich array of questions. Against the two defects mentioned above in utilitarian practical philosophy Rawls envisages two protective measures, both based upon the priority of the right over the good: rights as trumps (as has later been made into a fairly popular motto) and the non-deducibility of the right from the good. These measures are in fact two complementary interpretations of the priority of the right over the good in Rawls. It is because the right is not deducible from the good that it has the power of trump.[4] The whole scenario of "the veil of ignorance" is designed to illustrate how such priority is secured. Accordingly, the participants in this scenario are held to be incognizant of all robust and identity-shaping goods in order to ensure the rightness of the norms expected to come out of such a procedure. Only a thin or minimal sense of the good, covering only those goods in which people of quite different persuasions regarding the good life must all have an interest ("a high-order interest"), called 'primary goods,' is allowed to guide the scenario. In fact, the whole theoretical edifice rests on a system of normative priorities: the priority of the right over the good and the priority of the principle of liberty over the principle of equality, which in turn gives priority to the maximin principle over the principle of equal opportunity, all as a 'lexical' ordering of principles of justice. *A Theory of Justice*, as a scheme of priorities, where each level of priority can be seen as part of an overall appeal to an ultimate moment of unconditionality in practical reasoning, is a feat of deontic proceduralism in political philosophy.

To the extent that we follow Rawls in his justification of the priority of the right over the good, however, what we have presented so far is incomplete, because what makes Rawls skeptical about the good is also the hold of intuitionism both as a moral theoretical alternative among moralists and as a general pre-philosophical or common sense morality among the general public. Rawls finds intuitionism wanting, particularly because of its inability to provide or generate an objectively justifiable ranking of principles, and thus

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[4] Michael Sandel, "Political Liberalism," in his *Public Philosophy: Essays on Morality in Politics* (Harvard University Press, 20005), p. 212.

ineffective as a premise of moral problem resolution. The priority of the right, then, is also an appeal to an ideal of objectivity or clarity unattainable by intuitionism, which is bereft of an "explicit method" and "priority rules."[5]

Taken together, Rawls's opposition to both utilitarianism and intuitionism leads us to an ideal of practical reason that stipulates a certain level of disengagement or abstraction from substantive, concrete, or particular ideals of the good as necessary to recognize the import of our sense of the inviolability of the right, to make a reasonable case for the plurality of the conceptions of the good under the auspices of the right, and to take hold of the principles of the right, or justice, in as objective a way as possible. The name Rawls gives to this ideal of practical reasoning is 'constructivism,' or, more particularly, 'Kantian constructivism,'[6] and accounts for the principles of justice it specifies as the outcome of a procedural interpretation of Kant's categorical imperatives.

Rawls's account of the proper relation between the right and the good has been subjected to various criticisms. Critics were ready to detect even in such meticulous deontology specters of the good somehow having trespassed beyond the deontic veil, whatever measure of ignorance Rawls had assigned to the original position of the theory. For some, Rawls's neutrality was in fact too subordinated to "rationalist humanism," as a particular conception of the good, to allow any true priority to the right here. And if we acknowledge partial knowledge of the good, why don't we engage in a fuller discussion about the good?[7] Part of the reason for the slippage of the good through Rawls's carefully sanitized framework seems to be that, although what Rawls tries to achieve through

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[5] Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, pp. 34-40.

[6] John Rawls, "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory", *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 77, No. 9 (Sep. 9, 1980), pp. 515-572.

[7] William A. Galston, *Liberal Purposes* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 92-93. Galston contends that all neutralist theories of liberalism are covertly guided by rationalist humanism as a liberal theory of the good, which comprises three main considerations of worth: the worth of human existence, of human fulfillment and purposiveness, and of rationality.

recourse to "a certain procedure of construction" is what he calls pure procedural justice, as opposed to perfect or imperfect justice, his constructivism already presupposes certain foundational conceptions and values. This is why what is constructed here is the "content" of the political conception of justice, and, crucially, not the original position ("structure") itself, which is "simply laid out" as a representation of "a well-ordered society as a fair system of cooperation between reasonable and rational citizens regarded as free and equal."[8] Accordingly, first we get an independently justified procedure and then this serves to generate a procedurally justified outcome. In this sense, the structure of the constructivist procedure here could be understood as a much more elaborate version of the coin toss procedure, in which the legitimacy of the procedure relies on the fact that it is a procedural incarnation of the principle of equality of opportunity, whereas the legitimacy of the potential outcome relies on the already given or prearranged legitimacy of the procedure.[9] In any case, the procedure itself is not purified of conceptions and values but, on the contrary, presupposes a number of them.

If this is an accurate description of Rawlsian constructivism, however, then the whole enterprise would seem at least to be an attempt at clarifying an already presupposed conception. But clarification would probably seem too innocent to characterize the endeavor here. Ricoeur offers a more pointed portrayal, contending that "a procedural conception of justice at best provides a rationalization of a sense of justice that is always presupposed," which subverts lexical linearity. The whole theory now seems to rest not upon a lexical but a circular ordering, noticeable for instance in the fact that "a moral sense of justice founded on the concept of the Golden Rule" is pre-supposed by the theory and in the pre-insertion of 'self-respect' into the decision procedure as a vital ingredient of the thin

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[8] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 103. The procedure is designed to model and express "all the relevant criteria of reasonableness and rationality" and "the conceptions of citizen and of a well-ordered society".

[9] Enoch, "Can There Be a Global, Interesting, Coherent Constructivism about Practical Reason?" *Philosophical Explorations*, vol. 12, no. 3, September 2009, 319-339.

theory of the good, both embodying an indirect plea for an ethical foundation for justice, even in a self-professedly "purely procedural" theory.[10]

From what has been said so far it must be clear that there is some circularity in Rawls, leaving certain preconceptions unfiltered by the structure of the theory. But circularity is not in itself a problem; on the contrary, as Agnes Heller notes, true practical discourse is always circular.[11] Crucial here is whether, and the way in which, one takes account of circularity, which for a theory aspiring to be a purely procedural constructivism might cause some trouble. This is why even among those who largely follow in the footsteps of Rawlsian constructivism, the 'non-constructed' character of the procedure of construction itself might seem defective. Starting the process of construction from "reasoned standards" (or Rawls's 'considered convictions') would, according to O'Neill, for instance, "be circular, hence unreasoned,"[12] and preclude a constructivist justification of the procedure of construction.[13] On such a view, which is bent on sharpening the constructivist credentials of procedural practical reasoning, even this level of engagement with considered convictions appears illegitimate and unsatisfactory from a normative, constructivist perspective.

Rawls himself would acknowledge, unapologetically even, that he relies on certain preconceptions in his theory construction.[14] Moreover, in some ways he might seem to be

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[10] Paul Ricoeur, *The Just* (The University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 36-57. For a comparison between Rawls and Ricoeur, see Peter van Schilfgaarde, "Rawls and Ricoeur: Converging Notions of Empowerment to Justice," *Res Publica* (2009) 15: 121-136.

[11] Agnes Heller, "The Elementary Ethics of Everyday Life," in G. Robinson & J. Rundell (eds.), *Rethinking Imagination, Culture, and Creativity* (Routledge, 1994), pp. 48-65.

[12] Onora O'Neill, *Towards Justice and Virtue: A Constructive Account of Practical Reasoning* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 48.

[13] Kerstin Budde, "Constructivism All the Way Down – Can O'Neill Succeed Where Rawls Failed?", *Contemporary Political Theory*, Vol. 8, 2, 2009, pp. 199–223.

[14] Rawls's response to Habermas regarding the latter's criticism of justice as fairness as substantive, and not procedural, attests to this. According to Rawls, "Any liberal view must be substantive, and it is correct in

doing a hermeneutic clarification of certain foundational conceptions or deep insights of the liberal tradition of political thought.[15] But what is crucial for Rawls is that these conceptions are prevailing ideas in the public culture of liberal democracies; a condition delivering them from the burden of justification on the basis of a particular comprehensive doctrine or world view. Rather, these preconceptions have to be given a coherent shape by way of a 'reflective equilibrium,' and they have to be given expression and modeled in a fair procedure of construction (or decision procedure). That is, they are not necessarily comprehensive, and they can be embodied as a fair procedure of decision that would serve to decide principles of justice as a broad 'overlapping consensus' above particular allegiances.

Now, if Rawls from the outset admits the presence of some conceptions in his construction, is the question of circularity off target? Is referring us to the public culture of liberal democracies when accounting for the preconceptions of his theory sufficient justification to accept his argument about the non-comprehensive character of his enterprise? What is the normative status of a preconception "collected," as he says, from the public culture "at all level of generalities"? As Enoch makes clear, part of the appeal of constructivism in practical philosophy comes from its real or potential promise of providing the fruits of moral realism without being realist.[16] Similar to this, Rawls wants to reap the benefits of certain pre-understandings or convictions with comprehensive roots without embarking on a comprehensive project. He wants to use the merits or fruits of fairly

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being so." Additionally, "Procedural and substantive justice are connected and not separate," because "fair procedures have values intrinsic to them." See *Political Liberalism*, pp. 421-422.

[15] For a discussion of Rawls within the context of a broadly defined hermeneutical turn in contemporary political philosophy see G. Warnke, *Justice and Interpretation* (MIT Press, 1993), pp. 38-61.

[16] David Enoch, "Can There Be a Global, Interesting, Coherent Constructivism about Practical Reason?" *Philosophical Explorations*, vol. 12, no. 3, September 2009, 319-339.

comprehensive pre-understandings for non-comprehensive purposes.[17] This is why he does not rest with the quasi-hermeneutical character of his enterprise, but rather wants to devise a fair decision procedure out of his preconceptions to go on to generate principles of justice, which would rise above circular beginnings, at least at the level of the public standpoint, and thus manage to attain the status of an overlapping consensus.

That the good or, following Rawls, a particular conception of the good, slips through the contours of Rawls's framework was not the only problem here. From the very beginning, not only the so-called communitarian and, more generally, non-liberal, but also liberal critics of Rawls found behind all this talk of the diversity of the good, held to rest under the mandate of the right, a 'meta-theory of the good'[18] regarding the agentic relation to the good. And this is largely a privatizing conception; that is, a conception leading to the privatization of the good. Thus, what Rawls offers us is not only a principle of priority (and quasi-independence), but also a meta-theory of the good. And while for communitarians such a privatization of the good was untrue to the constitutive presence of the good for our identities and thus a failure as a meta-theory of the good, for liberals it was a sign of Rawls's ultimate inability to extricate his scheme of justice from idealization about the person vis-à-vis the good.[19] On the other hand, one might argue that this constitutive presence of the good is precisely what causes Rawls to diligently circumscribe a domain of

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[17] Or, in Ricoeur's words, "Rawls … seeks to have the best of both worlds -- that is, to be able to construct a purely procedural conception of justice without losing the security offered by the reflective equilibrium between conviction and theory." In his *The Just*, p. 56.

[18] Patrick Neal, *Liberalism and Its Discontents* (New York University Press, 1997).

[19] Michael Sandel's *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* represents the most well-known communitarian critique of Rawls on this score. Charles Larmore, a political liberal in his own right, criticizes Rawls as ambivalent between modus vivendi and (Kantian) expressivist types of liberalism due to Rawls's insertion of a certain (again, Kantian) ideal of the person into his theory. See Larmore's *Patterns of Moral Complexity* (Cambridge University Press, 1997 [1987]), pp. 118-130, and his "The Moral Basis of Political Liberalism," *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 96, No. 12 (Dec., 1999), pp. 599-625. Onora O'Neill, in her *Towards Justice and Virtue*, criticizes Rawls on similar grounds, that is, due to his 'idealization' in theory construction instead of staying only at the level of 'abstraction'.

priority and semi-independence for the right. What Rawls is trying to do is to save the right and its independent normativity from socio-cultural contingency and particularity. Even if the good is constitutive, it is a constitutive contingency tailored to particular allegiances at the personal or larger cultural level. To stay free from such conditionality, a procedural form of practical reasoning based on the priority of the right is held as decisive. What is deemed most important here is not the quality of the good one pursues, but the capacity to have a conception of the good.

2.2. Reasonable Virtues

Now, as can readily be seen from what has been said so far, Rawls's prioritization of the right over the good is not as neat as he wants it to be, and the relevant understanding of practical reason informing the whole enterprise incites suspicion regarding the feasibility of its objectives. Rawls's framework seems either to depend on grounds (circular beginnings) poorly acknowledged, or it is inconsistent with its own premises and unable to achieve its objectives. For my purposes, however, the main shortcoming of this endeavor lies with the ideal of practical reasoning informing this approach, mainly because it is crippling when it comes to taking account of what I call the aretaic depth of politics. Such principled insistence on keeping the good out and its attendant sources along procedural lines sterilizes ethico-political thinking against the fields and the profiles of virtues. One might argue that Rawls intentionally takes this as secondary to his more central purpose: a theory of justice and stability with special reference to the basic structure of society. But in many ways Rawls either presupposes or sometimes tries to attach dispositional qualities to ethico-political agency.

Parting from the tradition, Rawls at first takes justice not primarily as a virtue attributed to human agents, but as applying primarily to institutions (as "the first virtue of

social institutions"). Yet, later on, he specifies what he calls the sense of justice as indispensable for the citizens of a well-ordered polity. In this vein, Rawls quite often, but certainly in a more marked way in his later works, implies and assigns dispositional qualities to those who are to take part in his fair system of cooperation. Some of these dispositional qualities, like the sense of justice just mentioned, are more openly endorsed by the system, others less so and in a more subdued manner.

Among all the qualities of mind and character that Rawls makes us want to see in the citizens of a just polity, what he calls reasonableness looms the largest. Although he associates this notion with 'the sense of justice' he attributes to citizens along with 'the conception of the good', and although he speaks of these two qualities as 'capacities' and 'moral powers,' and not virtues, the way he elaborates the quality of reasonableness makes it appear like "a kissing cousin of traditional theories of virtue,"[20] because reasonable citizens are those who are well-disposed to abide by fair terms of cooperation, even at the expense of their own interests. That is, they are able to achieve self-restraint, which is the underlying virtue in all the traditional visions of ethics. The capacity for reasonableness is indeed the pivotal disposition around which justice as fairness as a political conception revolves. It calls for some measure of self-sacrifice from citizens entering the public space of deliberation and appeals to the citizenry to abstain from raising controversial conceptions of the good in public political exchanges. Reasonableness here figures as a form of self-restraint, or even a form of self-abstinence.

Respect constitutes another crucial element in what political liberalism hopes to see inculcated as a widespread disposition among the citizenry. Having such a venerable history behind it, it is not surprising to see respect among the cardinal political virtues political liberalism sanctions. This, one of the most seminal ideals of liberal modernity as a whole, finds one of its most profound elaborations, as so many others, in Kant. Kant's

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[20] William Connolly, "Suffering, Justice, and the Politics of Becoming," in David Campbell and Michael J. Shapiro (eds.) *Moral Spaces: Rethinking Ethics and World Politics* (University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 144.

second formulation of the categorical imperative, which requires that every human being be treated as an end in itself, and never merely a means, stands as Rawls's principal point of departure in delineating the notion of respect in his theory, according to which 'self-respect' constitutes the most important primary social good and the "natural duty of mutual respect" as the key attitudinal basis of healthy societal relations. The crux of the matter is again "abstaining from the exploitation of the contingencies of nature and social circumstance," whereby "persons express their respect for one another in the very constitution of their society."[21] In the Kantian underpinning of this conception, the dispositional and self-restraining quality of respect is a major ingredient. The feeling of respect should enable us to vanquish inclinations, because "an object of respect can only be … something that does not serve my inclination but, rather, outweighs it."[22]

Reasonableness and respect as virtues figure on the affirmative side of Rawls's theory of justice, but there are also virtues entering the domain of justice through negation, that is, not through affirmation of certain virtues but rather through negation of certain vices. Envy is one such problematic motive, or, to use Rawls's terminology, "special psychology," in need of restraint. Envy, as a feeling of sorrow for the good of others, which can sometimes also surface as a feeling of joy for the misfortune of others, has always been among the (seven) deadly vices in traditional moralities. But after the decline, in principle, of inborn hierarchies and privileges of pre-modern times anchoring each in his proper place in the social cosmos, it appears in the more triggered form of "democratic envy" and shows "an exponential growth" permeating "all levels of modern societies" and bordering on the brink

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[21] Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, pp. 177-9, 337-8, 440. Surely, Kant is not the only figure behind such an association of 'self-respect' and 'mutual respect.' As another modern precursor, Rousseau has a standing of his own. In explicating Rousseau's ideas on this score Rawls says, "as equal citizens we can all, by way of the respect of others, bring into harmony our need for self-respect". See *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, p. 248.

[22] Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, James W. Ellington (trans.) (Hackett, 1993), p. 13 [400-401].

of 'resentment.'[23] Rawls is alert about egalitarian and democratic dissimulations of envy and considers it as requiring the most emphatic kind of negation in the order of justice, so emphatic that it is ruled or factored out in the original position as inappropriate. Accordingly, although the system of justice does not foresee, as Dante did, the envious as destined for some sort of Purgatory, it purges rational actors in the original position of envy and of all other similar "accidental contingencies."[24] Prior to the derivation of the two principles of justice, Rawls rules out envy in the original position. After their derivation, he anticipates that the well-ordered and just society embodying the principles of justice will more or less preempt social conditions engendering envy or sufficiently moderate the social bases of envy, in which case any residual or emergent envy then arising does so as a matter of moral failure on the part of particular persons.

Another way in which virtue figures through negation in Rawls is found in his rejection of 'desert' as a criterion in justice-theoretic reasoning. Now, for those who are familiar with the place of the question of desert in the landscape of contemporary political philosophy, this contention might at first sound paradoxical, if not outright wrong. This is because what is distinctive in desert-based understandings of justice is their focus on the merits, achievements, and admirable qualities of responsible moral agents and their activities, which is quite at home with the vocabulary and tradition of virtue. The notion of desert is thus already well steeped in the idiom of virtue and any rejection of desert as a criterion might be considered as representing some break with the resources of this idiom. This is indeed one reason, according to MacIntyre, that non-desert theories of justice, like

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[23] Luc Ferry, *What is the Good Life?* (The University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 11-14. Others, for instance B. Russell, see a more positive aspect in the relation between democracy and envy; envy figuring as a driving force for democratic and egalitarian demands. See his *The Conquest of Happiness* (1930), pp. 90-91. But the same thing could, on the other hand, be seen as among the social-political sources of character disorder or disorder in virtues (more particularly, of *akrasia*, which is incontinence or weakness of will), as when A. O. Rorty says, "While officially condemning envy as a socially undesirable trait, most societies use, and even induce, envious traits to encourage the development of useful talents and abilities." See her "The Social and Political Sources of Akrasia," *Ethics* 107 (July 1997): 644-657.

[24] Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, pp. 530-541.

the ones advanced by Rawls and Nozick, lack an important basis for judgments about virtue.[25] However, the rejection of desert as it appears in justice as fairness seems intended to serve to the contrary, or so it could be argued. What Rawls invites us to accept in his rejection of desert as "arbitrary from a moral point of view" is the capacity to refrain from our usual or commonsense propensities to expect to be treated differently or better, or be owed more, than others just because or as a result of what providence or good fortune provided us with as an initially undeserved gift, that is, our inborn talents or given social positions. One's natural talents and "more favorable starting place in society" are not merited and should instead be seen "as a common asset" to be shared for the common good.[26] The morale of the argument is thus to persuade us to refrain from invoking desert-based notions in moral reasoning about social order and, even more, to be content with and affirm a social order bent on modulating our contingent and thus undeserved advantages in the direction of equality and for the benefit of the less fortunate, all because the grounds of merit are not themselves merited.

There is another way in which the notion of desert as "antecedent moral worth" comes in. This time, though, desert is not negated, as Rawls normally would have it, but instead returns by the back door, when the stress is on the prospects of criminals and bad characters in the just and well-ordered society. In a sense, whereas, on the one hand, distributive justice voids desert as an unacceptable basis or factor in composing its principles, retributive justice, on the other hand, recycles it through the prism of failed moral agency. What Honig calls "subjectivity failures" are treated as if they are justly

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[25] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame University Press, 1984[1981]), pp. 244-55.

[26] In Rawls's words, "the accidents of natural endowment and the contingencies of social circumstance" and "natural lottery in native assets, [which is] neither just nor unjust"; *A Theory of Justice*, p.15, 101-104, 310-5. Here it must be clear that Rawls does not propose a wholesale denial of desert but neutralizes or nullifies it prior to the derivation of the principles of justice. In a sense he neutralizes the effects of what others call "constitutive," "brute," or "background luck" on the social system of cooperation. In determining distributive principles desert is out of consideration. See Serena Olsaretti, "Justice, Luck, and Desert" in J. S. Dreyzek et al. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 436-50.

deserved or merited, and not put into examination in relation to contingent and thus morally arbitrary background conditions of misfortune. It is in this way that desert comes back in inverted form.[27]

It must now be clear that Rawls's affirmations and negations involve a number of important character traits and, either by openly invoking certain virtues or by firmly ruling out certain vices, he attributes some key dispositional qualities to the fit members of his well-ordered society. Yet I would argue that the whole idiom of virtue still maintains a tantalizing presence and eludes any satisfactory grasp in this frame. But how exactly is this the case? Part of the problem is related to the *range* of the virtues in Rawls's account and part of it is related to their *depth*. In other words, the whole frame is inspired by only a narrow range of virtues, and it does not give virtues their distinctive aretaic depth. First of all, almost all the virtues crossing the range of Rawls's principal concerns are cooperative virtues; mainly, civility, mutual respect, and public reasonableness. Here, what are sometimes called the "severe virtues"[28] of political existence, such as 'courage' and the virtues of civic engagement, are markedly subdued . Although it is not a modus vivendi model, as a "cooperative union of social unions," in which concern for 'political stability' is paramount, the just and well-ordered polity rests on the cooperative dispositions of citizens. These cooperative virtues are, in turn, modeled entirely in relation to reason-giving practices of citizens, that is, in terms of the kinds of reasons they could raise and the types of argumentation they could adopt in their public deliberations. Therefore, even though the

[27] Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 126-161.

[28] Daniel Mahoney, "Modern Liberty and Its Discontents: An Introduction to the Political Reflection of Pierre Manent", in D. J. Mahoney and P. Senton (eds. and trans.) *Modern Liberty and Its Discontents* (Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), p. 14.

political liberal virtues do not merely ensoul the already established and conventional good manners of a 'polite society', they are notably thin on aretaic grounds.[29]

That the distinctive aretaic depth of the virtues dissolves in the liberal political frame is certainly much more important, and it can be detected both in the way some key virtues are accounted for and in the overall conception of the status of the virtues. A remarkable instance of this problem is revealed in the way the virtue of respect is construed. As noted above, the idea of respect has a venerable history, finding its cues in some of the most important foundational texts of liberal philosophy. And, returning to Kant, as the most rigorous precursor of this whole idea, one may identify the roots of some of the recurring tensions in the liberal construal understanding of respect. For Kant attributes a distinctive and exceptional status to respect as a *moral* emotion with cognitive potency among all the other emotions. The moral status and the cognitive character of respect are derived, according to Kant, from its peculiar relation to the moral law. It is, in fact, our access to the moral law, to the unconditional demand of the categorical imperative on us. In other words, respect is the way the moral law or, to use a more contemporary idiom, the moral point of view, is disclosed to us, to our moral cognition. Characteristically moral demands seize us through our feeling of respect, because only in this way do we sense the sublime nature of the moral law. It is in this way that the power of the moral law commands us. What we feel when we are occupied by the feeling of respect is the unfathomable sublimity of the moral law irrespective of our inclinations to the contrary. Moral will, deprived of every other impulse, finds its "determining ground" in respect. This really puts respect on an exceptional plane given Kant's characteristic skepticism about the ethico-epistemic potency

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[29] Aware of this question W. Kymlicka strives to enlarge the implications of political liberal virtues, especially by invoking their egalitarian intent. He also tries to explain the limited range of virtues in political liberalism on the basis of the idea of "minimal citizenship", which does not put any particular normative stress on more engaged or participatory modes of citizen life, as opposed to the civic humanist conceptions of citizenship; in *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction* (Oxford, 2002), p. 300. For the notion of 'polite society', see Taylor's *Modern Social Imaginaries*.

of emotions. In a critical footnote in the *Groundwork* he grapples with this and seeks to justify his position:

> There might be brought against me here an objection that I take refuge behind the word "respect" in an obscure feeling, instead of giving a clear answer to the question by means of a concept of reason. But even though respect is a feeling, it is not one received through any outside influence but is, rather, one that is self-produced by means of a rational concept; hence it is specifically different from all feelings of the first kind, which can all be reduced to inclination or fear. What I recognize immediately as a law for me, I recognize with respect; this means merely the consciousness of the subordination of my will to a law without the mediation of other influences upon my sense. The immediate determination of the will by the law, and the consciousness thereof, is called respect, which is hence regarded as the effect of the law upon the subject and not as the cause of the law. Respect is properly the representation of a worth that thwarts my self-love.[30]

This passage well encapsulates all the critical aspects of the Kantian notion of respect: first, respect, though an emotion, is distinctive in being at the disposal of (pure practical) reason and it therefore signifies the capacity for the moral cognition of the law; and, secondly, respect is in essence respect for the law. Now in this second feature of the Kantian respect we find one tension in the liberal understanding of respect: respect here is fundamentally directed to the law or to the sublimity of the law, and not to another person in his or her concrete humanity. Now it would be fair to say that the kind of respect due to concrete others is thematized more in the second formulation of the categorical imperative, as noted above in relation to Rawls, rather than here in this more specific interpretation of respect as a moral emotion. But even then the object of respect is illustrated at the level of what Kant calls *homo noumenon*, as opposed to *homo phaenomenon*, that is, the object of

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[30] Kant, *Groundwork*, p. 14 [401-402]. See also Nancy Sherman, *Making a Necessity of Virtue: Aristotle and Kant on Virtue* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 175-81. For a now classic study distinguishing between 'recognition-respect' and 'appraisal-respect' see Stephen Darwall, "Two Concepts of Respect," *Ethics* 88 (1977), pp. 36-40. Regarding the object of Kantian respect, see also Michael Neumann, "Did Kant Respect Persons?" *Res Publica* 6: 285-299, 2000. For a more recent treatment of the topic from a phenomenological point of view see John J. Drummond, "Respect as a Moral Emotion: A Phenomenological Approach", *Husserl Studies* 22 (2006) pp. 1-27. Heidegger regards Kant's exposition of respect as "a brilliant phenomenological analysis of the phenomenon of morality" in *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 133.

respect here is primarily man as a universal category, and not in its concrete particularity. The level of Kant's reflection on respect, then, has in its purview primarily the moral status of the human being as rational agency. By itself, this hardly poses a problem, because it is perfectly legitimate to reflect on the moral status of human beings as objects of respect from a universal point of view. One can even argue that in order to make sense of respect at the level of concrete particularity one needs to keep the ambit of reflection on a higher level of generality or at the level of universality, which would in turn justify or ground the moral duty of respect to be displayed at the level of concrete practice.[31] However, if we are concerned more about how it is embodied and lived rather than its grounding, more about its flesh than its spirit, then this would certainly remain inadequate. And this Kant himself recognizes in his own way by depicting respect as a feeling or attitude operating from a distance, working through a distance, or putting between people a certain distance.[32] In a sense, distance imparts to respect its particular shape, it gives respect its distinctive merit. It would not, then, be unfair to designate Kantian respect for moral agency as a virtue of disengagement.

But do these lofty limitations apply to Rawls as well? Now, in good Kantian tradition, political liberalism stands alert to the ways in which one might treat the other as merely a means, that is, one might instrumentalize the other, violating the other's respect-standing. One way in which such violation occurs in civic and political life is to make others subject to policies and regulations that they do not reasonably consent to. And on the contrary respect is also shown through abstaining in public deliberations from defending one's

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[31] Even this could be questioned, however, mainly because to be able to recognize in the other's humanity a certain dignity claiming our unconditional respect, we have to be already steeped in this idea and practice, or at least have some inkling of it. Moreover, if Drummond is right, respect for persons in general is in fact experientially rooted in respect for morally meritorious persons. Otherwise put, respect for persons in the abstract is the harvest of a prior and deeper experiential respect one gleans over time in concrete contexts of human encounter.

[32] As he says, "The principle of mutual love admonishes them [rational beings] constantly to come closer to one another; that of the respect they owe one another, to keep themselves at a distance from one another"; in *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 6:462.

views in the face of others on grounds not shared by them, by preserving a certain distance between our comprehensive commitments and others, and rightfully expecting from others the same provision of distance. Not exposing others to our comprehensive views and expecting from others the same refuge for us against exposure to theirs constitute the principal manifestation of respect in the political liberal political frame. It is not difficult to see that here respect here is construed with regard to practices of reciprocal reason-giving in public. What are hereby foregrounded are certain capacities, and quintessentially our capacity for free moral agency, or our capacity to form and revise plans of life without unjustified or unreasonable exposure to perspectives we give no assent. What is respected in Rawlsian respect, then, is the capacity for agency, and the primary course of such respect is some provision of distance.

Some precision is needed here, however. Even when construed as a virtue of distance, respect has its own distinctions. Distance can be protective; it may arise as a manifestation of attentiveness in many instances, as one can easily understand from the ordinary everyday implications of "invasiveness" as an unpleasant attitude towards others. And when it comes to virtues, distance is certainly not necessarily an ethical shortcoming; on the contrary, sometimes virtues can only flourish across certain distances, across enabling distances between fellows, friends, and interlocutors. Distance might, therefore, work as the very condition for the maintenance of a dependable human moral context favorable to nurture sound human relations. On the other hand, as R. Sennet's[33] more sociologically informed work on the prospects of mutual respect across unequal relations under contemporary social conditions shows, the provision of distance might turn out to be a baffling constraint,

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[33] Richard Sennett, *Respect in a World of Inequality* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2002). Especially in his earlier studies, however, Sennett sees the balance in the contemporary American socio-moral experience leaning heavily toward excessive intimacy and closeness at the expense of distance qualified by respect; see his famous *The Fall of Public Man* (Knopf, 1978). For an account of how cultural and class variations complicate attitudes of respect see also Sarah Buss, "Appearing Respectfully: the Moral Significance of Manners," *Ethics* 109 (1999), pp. 795-826. And, for a piece searching for ways of getting across "experiential distance," see Jacob Schiff, "Inclusion and the Cultivation of Responsiveness," *The Good Society*, v.18 n.1 (2009), pp. 63-9.

sometimes accomplishing what is required of it, that is, showing respect in ways that would not be demeaning to the self-esteem of relevant others, yet at other times it undermines the very point of respect, transforming it into an easy virtue of detachment or indifference with little or no practical bite. Working across inequalities, that is, across actual or latent force lines of resentment, envy, or hatred, brings out some of the more delicate features of respect as an attitude. In contexts where inequality reigns sovereign, respect is in chronically short supply and its responsive character is impaired. An internal strain in attitudes or practices of respect is thus unveiled when we try to figure respect into complex situations of human encounters and respect-as-distance shows its dark side.[34]

Now, Rawlsian respect is basically an elaboration of what is usually distinguished as recognition-respect, which is the kind of respect we owe each other as part of our mutual recognition in each other the 'status' of equal citizens, quite independently of our actual evaluative considerations, or appraisal-respect, about each other. So conceived, respect is not contingent upon one or the other's merit or demerit, and it is thus a highly status-oriented concept, as many other key concepts of deontology are. In a sense, it gives expression to the recognition of modern 'categoric identities'.[35] As a status-oriented concept, Rawlsian respect will always have an eminent role to play in juridical type of political thinking. Respect here is the principle that the law wants to see as operative among the citizenry; or it is the way law thematizes inter-human relations; the way law addresses

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[34] It is also worth noting that even recognizing distance requires cultivated habits, dispositions and sensibilities in order to be able to achieve a clear grasp, or what Nussbaum, with an ironic allusion to Rawls, dubs "perceptive equilibrium" regarding the requirements of the situation at hand. Perhaps it is best to achieve what Dallmayr calls "a linkage of closeness and distance" in "political interaction[s] both below and above the level of the State." See Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 182; Fred Dallmayr, *Polis and Praxis: Exercises in Contemporary Political Theory* (MIT, 1984), pp. 9-10.

[35] For the distinction between 'categoric identities' of modern (national) times as opposed to 'network identities' of pre-modern times, see Craig Calhoun's studies on nationalism. Additionally, it should be obvious that here the point is not about the deferential respect of earlier times, that is, respect for status in, say, a hierarchical society, or respect for some unequal status rooted in role or socioeconomic differences.

us. But when it comes to seeing respect as a capacity to respond to other human beings in genuinely other-regarding ways, and when our focus is on how respect unfolds as a deed, Rawlsian respect inevitably seems "a kind of rough-cut, partially self-regarding, giving-of-space to the other."[36]

But are we justified in demanding more than this? Is it fair and legitimate to demand a richer understanding of this or that virtue in such a framework? The answer may be affirmative, but only if your moral framework or view of the moral universe is amenable to it; and it is here that we see an important and perhaps more structural problem in Rawls's ethico-political philosophy that is pertinent to our question: namely, the problem of 'supererogation.' Supererogation is usually defined as what lies 'beyond the call of duty,' beyond what could legitimately, that is, normatively, be expected from a moral agent. Either because the relevant attitude or deed is reasonably beyond the ordinary powers of the agent, or because no absolute or unconditional normative ground could be offered to hold the agent responsible for it, it is deemed supererogatory, literally, beyond one's debt. This notion was fairly important for medieval Christian ethics, and something closer or analogous to it can be discerned in other civilizations. In Muslim ethics and jurisprudence (*fiqh*), for instance, contrastive categories of action or deed like *farz* versus *nafila*, *fatwa* versus *taqwa*, or *zaruri-haci-tahsini*, capture something similar to what is indicated by the notion of supererogation. The point in all these categories is to specify a distinct domain of actions, attitudes, and conduct that are commendable yet outside the domain of what is enjoined as firmly obligatory with requisite sanctions, this-worldly or not. In this respect, it is quite critical for clarifying the virtue status of the virtues or the status of the virtues in an overall morality.

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[36] Stephen K. White, *The Ethos of a Late-Modern Citizen* (Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 47.

The notion in fact comes fairly close to our ordinary moral intuitions, particularly regarding the possibility of utterly altruistic, heroic, or saintly deeds.[37] These are good, but not required, or recommended, but not required, in the normatively strict sense of the term. Almost no society or civilization is lacking a plethora of stories of such deeds and exemplary figures instantiating a number of them. But, although sympathetic to ordinary moral intuition, the notion of supererogation might well risk putting our cherished virtues on a normatively unstable footing because, once we centerstage what is obligatory, again in the strictly normative sense of the term, virtues risk losing their demanding power. Especially in moral frameworks where there is a strong urge to evaluate actions, deeds, and attitudes primarily from the perspective of distinctions between what is within and what is beyond the call of duty, virtues lose any robust positive determination as to their worth that could render them morally attractive or even relevant. Any moral framework thematizing the moral universe on the basis of some small number of evaluative principles may face this challenge, but this is especially the case for moral frameworks working from within a deontic orientation.[38] This is because the priority in such frameworks is to establish a deontic level of consistency and unconditionality, but it is quite possible to obtain this at the expense of a robust place for virtues. Specifying the precise boundaries of duties requires treating acts beyond the call of duty as a special category irreducible to duty; otherwise two equally unpalatable prospects would loom large in our moral horizon: either the supererogatory would be forced into the moral system, rendering it unreasonably demanding, or the importance of anything beyond the obligatory would be inappropriately

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[37] In fact the question is regularly debated in the relevant literature with reference to heroic or saintly deeds. See for examples, J. O. Urmson, "Saints and Heroes", in *Essays in Moral Philosophy*, A. Melden (ed.) (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1958), pp. 198-216; C. New, "Saints, Heroes and Utilitarians", *Philosophy* (1974), 49: 179-189; E. Pybus, "Saints and Heroes", *Philosophy* (1982), 57: 193-199; S. Wolf, "Moral Saints", *Journal of Philosophy* (1982), 79: 419-439.

[38] Bernard Williams is among a number of notable scholars putting forward this question in his classic *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Fontana Press, 1993[1985]). For a recent evaluation of Kantian ethics in relation to the question of supererogation see Jens Timmermann, "Good but Not Required?—Assessing the Demands of Kantian Ethics," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 2.1 (2005), pp. 9-27.

toned down. Part of the problem, then, rests on the structuring terms of deontic thinking, such as rights, duties, and obligations, which are sometimes called the moral trinity of deontic logic. Once you try to conceive the whole ethical field as revolving around these terms or to fashion an evaluative vocabulary placing these terms center stage, it becomes hard to articulate the power of most admirable human qualities in a compelling way and to ascribe some moral force to them. As O'Neill points out, in most cases, these qualities will be marked quite neutrally as 'permissible,' without any account of their positive value or of why they are good or constitutive of the good, and, therefore, they will inevitably be classified as matters of 'discretion.'[39] This means that the operational categories at hand do not allow for or at least resist a richer characterization of virtues. If it is neither duty, nor obligation, then it is bluntly designated as permissible.

All this sheds some light on the question of why we feel puzzled over whether we are justified in demanding more regarding virtues in political liberalism. Rawls's entire framework is premised upon the same moral trinity, and virtues largely stand ancillary to it. We do not find a richer account of the virtues because the moral framework is skewed toward procedural consistency in the service of generating governing principles of a just society. And in order to come to terms with virtues, which are still accorded some relevance in this framework, he does not avoid evaluating their status within the reach of the question of supererogation. This is expressed when Rawls states: "For once the principles of right and justice are on hand, they may be used to define the moral virtues just

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[39] Onora O'Neill, *Towards Justice and Virtue: A Constructive Account of Practical Reasoning* (Cambridge University Press, 1996). Most contemporary theories of justice, according to O'Neill, are only 'leaving some room' for virtues. Moreover, they, including Rawls, hardly recognize any space for 'obligations without counterpart rights' (meaning, no obligation without right), thereby tilting the moral system toward rights. In other words, in this way the deontic moral framework is skewed toward one element it comprises. On the other hand, she is trying to improve upon these shortcomings of deontic thinking, making recourse to the distinction between perfect and imperfect duties going back to Kant, and thereby deriving a range of 'required virtues' to sustain justice.

as in any other theory. The virtues are sentiments, that is, related families of dispositions and propensities regulated by a higher-order desire."[40]

What renders such an approach vulnerable is that most acts, attitudes, and feelings that normally figure in the aretaic depth of a particular virtue and thereby enhance and even partially constitute it, would turn out to be supererogatory in such a framework, because they could not reasonably be identified as more than a matter of good manners given the priorities endorsed. How would 'tact,' for instance, which Aristotle cites among the virtues of social intercourse (or of conversation)[41], and many others such as gentleness, kindness, and receptivity, which altogether work like a complex constellation of mutually qualifying and reinforcing sensibilities, be characterized here? More importantly, how could anything supererogatory as it is understood here infuse our practical investments? How could they be nurtured as virtues on which a just and stable society could flourish?

Still, most political liberals writing in the footsteps of Rawls think that a modicum of virtues inculcated in the citizenry mainly through education would suffice to protect the polity from degeneration into undesirable forms of social-political intercourse. Indeed, most political theorists writing in this vein are fond of describing virtues along instrumentalist lines. But I think this only exacerbates the aretaic minimalism of their conception. Admittedly, instrumentalism has its own attractions. Mainly a question in the philosophy of science, instrumentalism in ethics seems to offer its adherents a means to rid themselves of unwanted normative burdens without mutilating or entirely eradicating their uses. In this respect instrumentalism in regard to virtues presents its adherents with the opportunity of benefiting from the promises of virtues without bearing the burden of thematizing their deeper underpinnings or their somewhat weightier requirements. As it seems to me, however, against a purely instrumentalist affirmation of virtues it would not be unfair to raise a question that is quite similar to the one usually raised with respect to

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[40] Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 192, but also 478-79.

[41] *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1126a26-1128a26.

utilitarianism: Would it be desirable to stick with what Nozick calls "experience machines"[42] designed to maximize pleasure and minimize pain, given the elemental status of these two feelings in the utilitarian moral psychology? This is no rhetorical question; on the contrary, it brings theoretical differences into sharp relief. And in the case of instrumentalism regarding virtues one could ask if we should seek other instruments that would work as functional equivalents of virtues given virtues' instrumental and dependent status, their being less than an intrinsic constituent of the human good.

As it seems to me, from a virtue-oriented ethical perspective an instrumental understanding of the virtues prompts three questions. The first concerns what is called in the tradition the *enkratic* (self-controlled or continent) personality type, that is, the type of personality who follows the path of the virtues by self-pressure rather than as a manifestation of the relatively harmonious tempering of his or her character. Although the enkratic personality perhaps represents the most widely circulating character type in any given society, it is not idealized by the ethics of virtue.[43] Secondly, in most cases instrumental (or instrumentally excellent) qualities are not necessarily virtues. Courage displayed in an unjust cause or in piracy, for instance, would not count as a virtue. As instrumental, any such quality can work for good or for ill, and to count as a genuine virtue it requires to be constitutive of a genuine good. This brings us to the third question: the question of the aretaic or non-aretaic value of goods toward which virtues aspire. In Swanton's helpful characterization, according to "the thesis of non-aretaic value,"[44] there are some basic goods or values having independent worth on non-aretaic grounds and virtues are derived on the basis of these base level goods for which virtues are instrumental.

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[42] Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974).

[43] Aristotle distinguishes between four basic character types: virtuous, *enkratic* (self-controlled, continent), *akratic* (who lacks self-control, incontinent, or weak in will), and bad or vicious (I exclude the divinely/heroic/superhuman virtues and the brutish/malicious characters lying on the two edges of the spectrum); see *NE*, book VII.

[44] Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 34-41.

In other words, some goods have non-aretaic (or virtue-independent) value, but virtues are instrumental to them. But although the value of all the things attracting or deserving our virtuous responses does not depend on those virtuous responses themselves (nature, for instance), in the case of most other goods virtuous endorsement or acknowledgment of them constitutes an integral element of their worth as goods (pleasure and wealth, for instance). I think for most of the characteristically political goods we pursue (such as justice, stability, and order) the second condition applies. Their worth or goodness is conditional, fully or in part, upon their being achieved in ways that accord with the relevant virtues. Therefore, listing some "primary goods" first and then postulating some virtues as instrumental to them does not quite capture this sort of a relation between virtues and goods.

However, despite all the above criticisms, one might still find political liberalism in line with a broadly virtue-ethical stance in one important respect: the 'domain-specificity' or 'modularity' of the virtues.[45] One might argue that the virtues are largely domain-specific qualities and, given that the interest of political liberalism lies primarily in the field of public political deliberation, it is broadly in accord with the ethics of virtue. Accordingly, from a virtue-ethical standpoint, Rawls might be taken as specifying some domain-specific virtues, relevant particularly in the field of public political engagements. Interestingly, Rawls, too, is using the notion of modularity in accounting for some possible ways in which a number of comprehensive views prevailing in liberal societies could converge on an overlapping consensus, on the political conception of justice, construed as a module.[46]

Now, domain-specificity, if not taken to extremes or in too mechanical a way, is a plausible and an already well-recognized feature of the ethics of virtue. It expresses the

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[45] For the notion of "modules of virtue" see Robert M. Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good* (Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 125-7. The notion of domain-specificity is more extensively used.

[46] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, pp. 12-3, 144-5.

domain-relative tuning of the virtues. But does this really apply to Rawls's case? This all depends on what the Rawlsian module demands from us. On closer inspection, it is difficult to see what is entailed by the modular accommodation of comprehensive views as a domain-specific or modular fine-tuning of the virtues, or as a plea for ethico-political conduct matching the sensitivities of the domain in which one is acting. It is rather more like a prior stylization of one's own beliefs and opinions so as to conform to the overlapping consensus. It is one thing to recommend that people conduct themselves with care, responsibility, and respect in deliberating upon matters of common concern that involve diverse and conflicting points of view. It is quite another to call them to tailor their comprehensive views in advance to fit into an already specified module. To put the matter in terms of White's useful metaphor, in the latter case the question turns on *what* to carry *where*, but in the former it turns on *how* to carry it. This also renders political liberalism vulnerable to the charge that virtues here turn into rules of deliberation, or into "dispositions necessary to produce obedience to the rules of morality."[47] Moreover, although virtue ethics (and the virtues) are sensitive to domain differentials, it is at least equally emphatic on the development of a relatively well-integrated character over time and across domains. Accordingly, most virtue ethicists also affirm some relatively domain-neutral virtues, most notable among them being *phronesis*, which, as a cultivated ability to perceive and judge contingent particulars in the right way, constitutes the integrative core virtue in the life of the *phronimos*.[48]

What we have seen so far makes it clear that even if we can grant that the political liberalism of Rawls endorses either from the outset or en route a range of virtues expected to be sustained by the just society, the virtue status of the virtues is heavily mortgaged by a

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[47] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, pp. 232-3. For MacIntyre this is common to all the Enlightenment moralities.

[48] For a critique of political liberalism on the grounds that it puts up unnecessary impediments to character integration (or integrity, in general), see David Thunder, *Rethinking Modern Citizenship: towards a Politics of Integrity and Virtue*, unpublished PhD dissertation (The University of Notre Dame, 2006). Swanton construes love and respect as domain-neutral virtues enlivening all the other virtues; *Virtue Ethics*, pp. 99-127.

number of normative commitments underpinning the overall framework. Thus, the virtues pale in normative importance and leave us at the level of aretaic minimalism. And in this way the aretaic or *Bildung* character of the political field is minimized, too. But, then, what is this curious thing we call aretaic depth? In what sense is a depth dimension opened up in relation to virtues? Very briefly, it refers to three relatively common properties of any robust aretaic conception. In the first place, the virtues (and vices) are like complex semantic clusters. They are complex dispositions standing in intricate relations of reciprocity with each other, and not just theoretically so, that is, in our thinking of them, but practically and existentially, making each other possible, richer, brighter, or impossible, weaker, dim. Consider Aristotle's criticism of the Spartans, who, as he describes them and their constitution, had regard for virtue but only for one part of virtue, and "their whole system of laws is directed to securing only a part of virtue, military prowess."[49] In other words, they cultivate among all the (cardinal) virtues only courage, thereby leaving it unqualified by other virtues, and most importantly, by moderation. Consider, on the other hand, a modern-day virtue ethicist, MacIntyre, who establishes a similar sort of relationship between justice and generosity: "A certain generosity beyond justice is required if justice is to be done," and, "there is no real justice when there is no generosity."[50] In a similar manner I. Murdoch aptly notes. "A list of virtues must establish not only a hierarchy, but also a sense of interpenetration. … Justice must make a pact with mercy."[51] What is indicated here is that the virtues are virtues only along a range of various determinations and along this range a virtue might shade over into a vice and vice versa, which is today expressed in terms such as "the fruitful ambiguity of the virtues" or "the threshold conception of the

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[49] Aristotle, *Politics*, 1271a37. Also in the same passage: an "equally serious error is that while they rightly hold that the good things which men fight to get are to be won more by virtue than by vice, they wrongly suppose that these good things are superior to the virtue."

[50] Alasdair MacIntyre, "The Illusion of Self-sufficiency," in Alex Voorhoeve (ed.) *Conversations on Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 125-6.

[51] Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 295.

virtues."[52] Put differently, the virtues are not discrete properties but, on the contrary, they distinctively figure only in tensional or friendly relation to a host of other virtues. In a sense, there is a certain magnetism among the virtues and they live and are kept alive (or not) in the vicinity of other virtues, which is perhaps the best we can gather from that notorious ancient idea of the 'unity of virtues' in our times. This underpins our above misgivings about the virtue of respect as it is construed in some contemporary political theories. Respect is an expressively rich virtue that is wide open to 'ambiguity' and it can be enlivened or deadened depending on its relation to other virtues and vices. The eclipse of aretaic depth in general becomes manifest also in the impoverished understandings of the distinctive aretaic depth of particular virtues.

This first dimension of aretaic depth is sustained by a second one: the affective-motivational texture of the virtues. We respond and react to situations, and relate to people and ourselves not only in reason but also in emotion. It is a familiar feature of virtue ethics to focus on the cultivation of fine inner sensibilities and emotional potentialities, and on the seasoning of desires so as to grow sensitive to the morally salient features of the world. Although the (quasi-)cognitive character of emotions has been a matter of debate in moral philosophy, and some strands of thought such as Stoicism were apprehensive of emotions due to their ecstatic character that is potentially disintegrative of the Stoic ideal of *apathia*, virtue ethics in general has seen emotion theory as integral to ethics, because the development and maturation of ethical feelings, or affective maturation, is deemed an important part of the development of ethical understanding.[53] Aristotle gives expression to

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[52] For the former notion see Jean Porter, "Virtue" in G. Meilaender and W. Werpehowski (eds.) *Oxford Handbook of Theological Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 205-19; and for the latter, C. Swanton, *Virtue Ethics*, pp. 24-5.

[53] In a number of important works Martha Nussbaum tries to reinvigorate a neo-Stoic, cognitive conception of emotions; especially in her *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge University Press, 2001). For an illuminating account of the role of emotions in virtue ethics, see Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 91-120. Also, Susan Stark, "A Change of Heart: Moral Emotions, Transformation, and Moral Virtue," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 1.1 (2004), pp. 31-50.

this when he says, "We ought to have been brought up in a particular way from our very youth, as Plato says, so as both to delight in and to be pained by the things that we ought; this is the right education." The overall aim in virtue education is to ripen the potentiality to "feel them [emotions] at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way."[54]   To learn to be motivated by the right kind of desires and to foster emotions as part of our capacity for judgment is essential here. But this takes on a more ethico-political accent if we construe justice, for instance, as "a complex set of passions to be cultivated, not an abstract set of principles to be formulated," and as beginning with "compassion and caring, not principles or opinions,", and involving "right from the start, such 'negative' emotions as envy, jealousy, indignation, anger, and resentment, a keen sense of having been personally cheated or neglected, and the desire to get even."[55] Beneath some of the more rational-deliberative processes of our social and political life lies the magma of affective-motivational experiences, which, if properly worked upon, can be shaped up into more refined capacities for ethical discernment. More generally, all these of these factors and the affective-motivational orientation of virtue ethics could be taken as gesturing toward a more 'transformative' (or self-transformative) perspective in ethics and politics.[56]

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[54] Aristotle, *NE*, 1104b11-12; 1106b22-25.

[55] Robert Solomon, *A Passion for Justice: Emotions and the Origins of the Social Contract* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995).

[56] For the notion of "transformative democracy" see Fred Dallmayr, *Achieving Our World: Toward a Global and Plural Democracy* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), pp. 82-7. As it seems to me, Connolly's constant stress on the need for "working on affective registers" expresses a comparable appeal to a self-transformative understanding of politics; see William E. Connolly, *Pluralism* (Duke University Press, 2005). Additionally, in contemporary political theory one can observe a growing awareness of the importance of emotions in political deliberation and therefore of the need to broaden the scope of deliberative political theory to encompass the vital role of emotions. For a study stressing the "strongly affective character of much everyday political deliberation" see P. Hogget and S. Thompson, "Toward a Democracy of the Emotions," *Constellations* v.9 n.1 (2002), pp. 106-26. For another interesting work taking the role of emotions into account, see John O'Neill, "The Rhetoric of Deliberation: Some Problems in Kantian Theories of Deliberative Democracy," *Res Publica* 8 (2002), pp. 249-68.

Cultivated ethical discernment, however, is not reducible to healthy forms of moral affectivity and motivation, which are necessary but not sufficient for morals. They are supported and sustained by a particular working of reason captured in the notion of *phronesis*. Usually translated as practical wisdom, phronesis denotes the situated character of judgment, ethical decision making, and ethical conduct in general. It is an "ethical finesse" in Hatab's words. Construed in this way it conforms well to the complexities and intricacies of aretaic depth mentioned above. Phronesis is at work in the warp and woof of everyday life, from relatively trivial difficulties to more complex ethical situations and predicaments where the norms, rules, or principles abstractly defined fall short of helping us conceive, let alone practice, fitting responses. It is at work in situations where, as Ricoeur notes, the choice is to be made not between right and wrong or good and bad but between bad and worse or sometimes between gray and gray.[57] In this regard, phronesis, as part of our overall ethical bearing, signifies the ubiquity or pervasiveness of the ethical. Ethical life is not limited to certain moments and occasions. As Gadamer writes, "It is not discretionary, but we are always already ethical," and phronesis is "the wakefulness of one who acts."

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[57] Paul Ricoeur, *Reflections on the Just* (Chicago University Press, 2007), pp. 242-43.

CHAPTER 3

BEYOND MINIMALISM: TOWARD LIBERAL VIRTUES

In the preceding chapter we saw in the case of political liberalism a complicated example of aretaic minimalism. In this chapter, I will focus on a number of attempts at improving upon political liberalism with respect to the question of virtues. Will Kymlicka[1] notes that current interest in the question of virtue derives from a wider concern with the question of citizenship. Differently put, the question of virtue in recent political theory emerged as a sub-topic of citizenship theory. At the heart of the question, then, lies an interest in the cultivation of good and responsible citizenship. But Kymlicka also presents this as a strategic move to continue debates over liberal justice in a more acceptable way. As I understand him, Kymlicka sees the rise of virtue-oriented thinking in political theory as a transfer of argument from a more controversial plane to a more amicable one. Instead of debating over the best form of liberal justice, political theorists of certain persuasions turned toward reflecting on the need for and the conditions of good citizenship as a necessary backdrop of liberal polity and culture. As far as I can see, however, although the strategic transfer of the argument or attempted changes in the terms of the debate is always understandable in political thinking, there is much more at stake than a merely strategic theory orientation. The whole debate is also a debate over the soul of liberalism or liberal politics. It is a kind of soul-searching in and for liberalism. Those who partake in this

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[1] Will Kylmicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

search are either proposing to improve on current forms of liberal theory and politics by integrating an aretaic language and perspective into the moral vocabulary of liberalism,[2] or trying to unearth a deep and unacknowledged flirtation of liberalism with virtue,[3] or substantiating the aretaic dimension or resources of liberalism itself so as to render it more viable and normatively potent.[4]

3.1. Relieving Liberal Embarrassment over Virtue: Berkowitz

The sufficiency or insufficiency of liberalism in giving a satisfactory account of virtues and their place in social and political life is a growing concern for many students of contemporary political theory. The recent decade has indeed witnessed a number of attempts at framing a characteristically liberal discourse on virtues, best exemplified by the works of Galston and Macedo. Berkowitz's work is another attempt at confronting liberal political theory with the question of virtue. In doing this, however, Berkowitz does not merely pursue a debate in contemporary political theory, but also tries to reach out to the makers of modern liberalism, Hobbes, Locke, Kant, and Mill, in order to unearth some deep-seated tendencies within the liberal tradition regarding the question of virtue. Somewhat surprisingly, he reads all these thinkers almost as virtue thinkers. Contrary to today's prevailing liberal habits, Berkowitz traces in these thinkers a continuous line of interest in the importance, or even necessity, of certain virtues in the formation and survival of liberal society and the state.

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[2] Ronald Beiner, *What is the Matter with Liberalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

[3] Berkowitz, Peter. *Virtue and the Making of Modern Liberalism*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999.

[4] Galston, William A. *Liberal Purposes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Macedo, Stephen. *Liberal Virtues: Citizenship, Virtue, and Community in Liberal Constitutionalism*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

As Berkowitz[5] tries to show, the revival of interest in virtue today is no longer restricted to a certain school of moral philosophy or to a certain line of political theory. Interest in virtue can be identified in many different circles of political theory, from liberals to deliberative democrats, from communitarians to feminist thinkers, and from neo-Aristotelians to natural law theorists. However, the same revival also elicits, usually on the part of some liberals, certain discomforts. Berkowitz observes or identifies five main reasons behind discontent about the revival of interest in virtue: a) concentration on virtues leads or may lead to the invocation of traditional notions of moral decency and propriety and a Victorian-style morality; b) the whole tradition of virtue is inextricably tied to certain metaphysical doctrines no longer acceptable today; c) virtues are inseparable from the martial ethic and chauvinistic morale of classical republicanism; d) virtue-centered conceptions of life and morality are inherently religious, meaning that they are inherently divisive; and e) cultivation of virtues brings about the risk of conformity at the expense of free experiments in self-creation.

Despite all these suspicions about the virtue tradition, however, liberalism still has its own characteristic enthusiasm for virtue, according to Berkowitz. In other words, there are liberal reasons to seek virtues. As very well put by Berkowitz, the liberal enthusiasm for virtue stems from a growing awareness regarding the nature of the principal, core theme, or concern of the liberal tradition, namely, the growing awareness that "liberty, as a way of life, is an achievement." This achievement requires certain virtues, which, in turn, develop out of education and cultivation, rather than spontaneously. The virtues Berkowitz mentions at this point are reflective judgment, sympathetic imagination, self-restraint, the ability to cooperate, and toleration. Another reason for the liberal rapprochement with virtue, according to Berkowitz, is the need of a liberal state and society for a certain sort of citizen for the healthy functioning, perhaps even the very survival, of key liberal institutions and practices.

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[5] Berkowitz, *Virtue and the Making of Modern Liberalism*.

In Berkowitz's presentation liberalism appears as caught between two contradictory tendencies: aversion to and enthusiasm for virtues. Yet, as he argues, a certain measure of reluctance to internalize virtues is a mark of "sobriety and vitality" in the liberal spirit. "A certain restraint in connection to virtue" seems to be the ideal stand on the question. This is because "every attempt to deny or to resolve the problem of virtue within liberalism suppresses an important dimension of the liberal spirit and deprives liberal practice of flexibility and strength." Therefore, some "ambivalence in regard to virtue" is a sign of vitality in liberal life. This vitality, however, does not obviate the ultimate dilemma facing liberalism when it comes to the question of virtues. As Berkowitz writes, "Liberalism depends on virtues that it does not readily summon and which it may even stunt or stifle." This point is in fact stressed by a variety of political theorists. Berkowitz articulates this problem around four major theses. First of all, both the logic of liberalism and its representative thinkers support the idea that both rulers and citizens need a range of virtues for the genuine actualization of key liberal ideals, which is, in Berkowitz's words, "the natural freedom and equality of all human beings". Secondly, historically speaking, liberalism held certain extra-liberal institutions, in particular, family, private education, and voluntary associations, as responsible for the cultivation of virtues. Differently put, classical liberal thinkers have traditionally taken these extra-liberal institutions for granted as the relatively secure bases fostering virtues. Thirdly, the liberal tendency to take liberal principles to the extreme risks causing the deterioration of these very institutions that are necessary for the vitality of liberal society. Here Berkowitz notes that this impulse toward the extreme is not peculiar to liberalism and that almost any type of regime might have the propensity to take its guiding principle to the extreme. In fleshing out this contention he relies on the works of Plato and Aristotle. Fourthly, and accordingly, for a possible renewal or revitalization of liberalism the strengthening of these institutions is a necessity.

Berkowitz acknowledges that the liberal tradition is essentially preoccupied with the promotion of freedom and the development of personal freedom as the prime task of politics. Freedom is considered more attainable and more just in comparison with virtue.

But this priority accorded to freedom cannot be translated into a full repudiation of the very idea of virtue, because "it is the logic of politics that makes virtue the permanent issue for every regime." Despite this, however, today, even if not in classical liberal times, the characteristic liberal attitude is one of hesitance in embracing the perspective of virtue, stemming from the liberal suspicions about notions of human excellence, perfection, and goodness. In order to counteract these suspicions Berkowitz gives an interesting interpretation of Aristotle, according to which the latter has, on the one hand, a generic-formal definition or understanding of virtue that is not necessarily subordinate to notions of human excellence, perfection, or goodness, and, on the other hand, what we might call a more substantive or comprehensive understanding of virtue. This distinction is meant to suggest that one can embrace the idea of virtue (as a formal-generic notion at the very least) without subscribing to a comprehensive conception of human excellence, perfection or the good life. Seen this way, virtue is a necessary dimension of any human activity, including political life. Put in quasi-Aristotelian language, virtue is a matter not only of the highest end of human life but also of lesser or intermediate ends. Any human achievement or goal hinges on some virtues. Accordingly, freedom, as a liberal ideal, is truly achievable only when it is underpinned by virtues conducive to it. Moreover, Berkowitz argues, for Aristotle the aim of the political life is not the promotion of human excellence and perfection as many ascribed to him, but is rather the maintenance of "actual imperfect regimes" by furnishing citizens with skills, abilities, and readiness against the destructive tendencies of their regime. The underlying aim was to tame harmful proclivities in regimes, not to transform imperfect regimes into perfect ones devoted to human excellence.

Disembedding a formal-generic notion of virtue and an understanding of virtue and politics geared toward preserving actual regimes from self-destruction, from deeper notions of ultimate end, human perfection, and the good life seems problematic in the case of Aristotle. Aware of this, Berkowitz does not neglect to add, "From an Aristotelian perspective, the student of politics must take into account the virtues relative to the maintenance of the specific regime in question as well as the virtues relative to a human

being's final end or perfection". Therefore, the ultimate end is inevitably a part of the Aristotelian framework. Yet, what Berkowitz tries to affirm is that inquiries into our *telos* do "not exhaust the inquiry into virtue." It might be said that by developing a somewhat attenuated conception of virtue Berkowitz is attempting to open a way to reach out to liberal sensibilities. He pursues a similar strategy in treating the metaphysical biology and cosmology of Aristotle. In line with some other moral and political theorists, Berkowitz argues that Aristotle's ethics and politics are not that heavily implicated in his metaphysics and cosmology. On the contrary, Aristotle's general method in ethics and politics is to analyze the ordinary language of moral life and refine the concepts in that language in order to arrive at a better and studied understanding of them. This we could do today, as well, according to Berkowitz. This way we can save our inquiries into virtue from speculative conceptions about human nature and order of the world.

It must be noted here that Berkowitz seems to feel some uneasiness about this purification of virtue from comprehensive conceptions, because, he says, "In the long run, a complete understanding of virtue does require an account of first principles and a defense of controversial opinions about human nature and the cosmos." Then why does he deliberately disengage from these questions? It is because of the anti-foundationalist, pragmatic, and post-metaphysical currents of today. If, as he remarks, the majority of academic political theorists think that it is possible to philosophize about justice, equality, and freedom without invoking foundational or fist principles, why must we put virtue into a more demanding process of inquiry? It is possible to make considerable progress in inquiring into virtue without appealing to first principles and foundations. In endorsing such a way of proceeding Berkowitz might seem to conform to the prevailing currents in contemporary thought. But, on the contrary, part of his goal is to expose the limitations and problems of contemporary perspectives, and this is one of the most interesting parts of his work. Berkowitz singles out three schools of political theory, deliberative democracy, feminism, and post-modernism, which he presents as "liberalism's children." Each of the three "has a liberal root that leading proponents tend to suppress" (usually radicalizing a

basic liberal concern); each is dependent on virtue but their proponents fail to acknowledge this; and each is incognizant of the vices their guiding principle generates. Deliberative democrats take a key liberal principle, consent, and seek to enhance and enlarge the consensual character of politics, but they overlook the significance of certain qualities of character for the growth of responsible consent. They also ignore the vices that emphasis on dialogue or deliberation might engender. Feminists rely on the liberal principle of natural equality and seek to substantiate it with more robust forms of egalitarian life between the sexes, but they usually do not attend to the need for character traits that would nurture an attitude of respect for equality. Postmodern approaches are usually inclined to focus on the liberal principle of individuality and celebrate self-development, or self-experimentation, but do not show sufficient care for the role of a "demanding education" that would foster self-restriction for the very development and maturation of one's capacities for self-formation and self-experimentation. In the end, all three, says Berkowitz, are "marked by a dialectic of extravagance" and, in each, "neglect, as a favored principle, enthusiastically carried to an extreme, works to obscure and sometimes undermines the preconditions for its actualization."

3.2. A Purposive Liberalism: Galston

Galston's *Liberal Purposes*[6] is mainly an intervention in the recurring controversies in contemporary political theory on the character of liberal societies, and on the possibilities and limitations of liberal thought. In these controversies during recent decades a number of topics or questions stand out: whether liberalism embarks upon a particular conception of the good, whether liberal societies are purely based upon neutral procedures of decision making so as to guarantee diversity that is characteristic of them, and whether

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[6] William A. Galston, *Liberal Purposes*.

these societies and their underlying liberal thinking obviate the flourishing of personal moral virtues, closely-knit communities, and enduring traditions.

Throughout the book Galston develops the themes, or sketches the contours of, what we might call a liberal politics of affirmation, relying on the thesis that the modern liberal state aims at a distinctive set of public purposes, bound up with the practice of a distinctive set of virtues (liberal virtues) and with an underlying public culture. Liberal purposes here constitute the unity grounding the very diversity of liberal societies. This affirmative position is set against a number of negations: the liberal state is not a purposeless civil association shaped by adverbial rules (Oakeshott); it is not a neutral structure but embraces a certain vision of the good, leaning toward some forms of life instead of others; and it is also not an unbounded sphere of differences, but a zone of diversity circumscribed by a certain unity. What Galston calls "purposive liberalism" is concerned with neutrality, civil association, and difference, yet this concern is fleshed out by allowing a vast arena for individual and collective choice in liberal societies. This does not mean, however, that liberalism is silent on what "citizens must publicly affirm."

Galston is idealizing a more purposive and substantive, and less formal and procedural, form of liberalism. For him the fundamental error of neutrality theorists stems from their confining of political possibilities to two extreme positions: either neutrality or (partisan) perfectionism. But, as Galston argues, "the good is a continuum" in which milder forms of both positions might be found. As he says, "There is a vast – and vitally important – terrain between Plato and Ronald Dworkin." One can espouse "a robust understanding of goods and virtues" and at the same time continue to preserve the principal achievements and insights of the liberal tradition. This is because the liberal conception of the good is compatible with pluralism; it allows for a wide variety of ways of life, but it is not unconstrained in an absolute sense. Particularly in terms of individual preferences, liberalism has a capacious outlook, carefully minimizing coercion against individuals, but separating this from legitimate restraints and coercion for, or in the name of, public purposes. Liberal conceptions of the good and liberal accounts of public purposes are

different from the perfectionism of classical antiquity. No *summum bonum*, no ideal way of life, is proposed by liberalism, which relies not only on images of perfection, but also on "experiences of deprivation and evil," and thus "adumbrates a small number of basic goods held to be worthy of special attention in individual and collective deliberation." This, according to Galston, suffices to inform our judgments for attaining public goods.

Before presenting his substantive ideas in more detail, Galston elaborates upon certain methodological quandaries in recent political theory. Two methodological tendencies might be identified as central in recent political thought. The first is "deep description," that is, "the elucidation of basic structures of moral belief in a certain culture," which Galston sees as a sort of pragmatism. The second is "wide justification," that is, in line with traditional philosophy, to examine the premises of a (political) culture "in light of (the possibility of) transcultural standards." Although Galston tries to strike a balance between the two, he is self-professedly more inclined toward the latter approach. Yet he emphatically puts the emphasis on deep description. Socratic moral-political thinking, with which he identifies, deems this sort of deep description vital in order to uncover the inconsistencies and weaknesses possibly residing in one's implicit assumptions.

What some would call the "deflationary"[7] character of much recent political philosophy seems troubling for Galston as well. According to him, Bernstein's book's title, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism,* captures the quandary besetting contemporary political thinking. As Galston explains, one characteristic of our *Zeitgeist* is seen as the drive to exorcize the impulse to transcendence, an attempt "rooted in Wittgenstein and Heidegger." Under the impact and pressure of this drive, most recent political theorists have turned toward situating reason or rationality, or philosophy in general, within particular social and discursive communities as a response to the challenges of both objectivism and relativism. But for Galston this response overlooks what we might call intra-discursive or intra-

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[7] Peter Dews, *The Limits of Disenchantment* (London: Verso, 1995); cited in J. Peter Euben, *Platonic Noise* (New Jersey: Princeton, 2003).

communal differences, and it counts as significant only those differences that are found across boundaries. It falsely regards communities as spheres having coherent agreements. Galston is trying to drive the argument toward an awareness of the fact that discursive communities do not by themselves provide coherent bases of normative resolution, at least not necessarily. The embrace of what Galston calls a "bedrock morality" by most recent theories testifies to the limits of particularism. Walzer's "minimal code" and H.L.A. Hart's "minimum content of natural law" display a kind of minimal universalism, according to Galston. Importantly, these bedrock moralities are not defended metaphysically, but are adduced from "the general features of human beings and of the circumstances in which they are ordinarily placed." Indeed, Galston thinks that in two circumstances political philosophy is impossible: a society with no inner contradiction at all (as in a Marxist utopia), and a society whose members are indifferent to contradictions and thus are not interested in "the criteria of formal rationality" to resolve contradictions. The latter one, as Galston says, "amounts to a fundamental change in the meaning of being human," but "this is what the call for the exorcism of the metaphysical impulse reduces to." It therefore seems that Galston concurs with the idea that foundational claims to ground ethics-politics are untenable, yet against the notions of situated rationality and a moral-political theory embedded in a particular discursive community or tradition, he points to the internal contradictions inevitably operating in any such community or tradition. Thus he is skeptical of both foundationalism, objectivism, and universalism, on the one hand, and particularism and localism, on the other.

Galston identifies three types of responses to cope with contradictions internal to liberal society. One is affirming the multiplicity of relevant considerations and denying general validity to any single one of them. Instead, the question at hand must be decided in terms of the conditions or requirements of the particular situation; in other words, striking a balance among the relevant considerations according to the needs of the particular situation. This is closest to our pre-reflective consciousness on Galston's view. As it seems to me, he is alluding to the notions of *phronesis*, prudence, practical judgment, or, in general, the

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interpretive-hermeneutic approach. The second type of response is endorsing a privileged principle above and beyond others. This is exemplified by notions such as the *summmum bonum*, lexical priority, and rights as trumps. The third is a kind of dialectical thinking in a Platonic-Hegelian vein. According to this, competing and contradictory views are partial and incomplete approximations of a more comprehensive truth. Galston claims that each of these responses "represents a break from ordinary consciousness." Each takes our ordinary world as a Platonic cave and "embraces some distinction between opinion and knowledge." However, the Socratic-Platonic distinction between opinion and truth does not denigrate opinion, but actually takes opinion as its starting point. Especially in the realms of ethics and politics opinions are crucial points of departure for thinking. This is in contrast to the Cartesian model of mathematical certainty as the paradigm case of true knowledge or truth. Galston is trying to reach a conclusion in which this sort of a Socratic thinking makes it possible to reject Cartesian foundationalism together with the distinction between opinion and knowledge. Galston cites Rawls's idea that we can do moral philosophy without recourse to the theory of meaning, epistemology, philosophy of mind, or metaphysics, with some reservations. He welcomes the idea that moral theory or epistemology starts from our substantive moral considerations, but does not accept the idea that moral and political thought might be disentangled from other branches of philosophy. Social philosophy might be beyond foundationalism, but it is not a self-enclosed activity.

Although at some points he seems ambivalent or vague, Galston seeks the possibility of coherence in moral and political thinking, a coherence obtained with recourse neither to foundational premises, nor to local or parochial enclaves. Out of our substantive moral considerations we might strive to achieve the maximum possible coherence in our account of morality without falling back upon the naive idea that we will somehow find an overarching general principle capable of rendering all our goods commensurable with each other. We might come up with a plausible ranking of the goods we espouse, and we might formulate principles about when and where, or under what conditions, we can discount some goods for the sake of others. None of them commits us to objectivism. Yet, through

the dialectical movement of thinking we need to attain the most coherent articulation. Galston's approach seems akin to a kind of pragmatic hermeneutics, carefully open to the possibility and promise of transcultural values. It is thus easy to see where he is trying to take us: beyond universalism and particularism (or parochialism), beyond foundationalism and relativism, and beyond intuitionism and "rigorism." However, the road going beyond these dichotomies is not sufficiently clarified, apparently because he does not undertake a sustained methodological exploration.

Before elaborating on his account of liberal virtues, Galston also examines a number of prominent critics of liberalism. As a general remark he first points out that today's critics take their bearings not from dormant ideas of the past, but from currently valid and potent aspirations of liberal society, such as community, democracy, equality, and virtue. But, contrary to its critics' claims, liberalism does not undermine community. Rather, it is itself a form of community. It does not refuse virtues, but, despite the utter disregard on the part of prominent liberals, liberalism requires many virtues to remain alive. Restating his case, Galston stresses the need for "a non-neutral, substantive liberalism committed to its own conception of the good, broadly (though not boundlessly) respectful of diversity, and supported by its own cannon of the virtues."

One of Galston's characteristic arguments is that liberal theory and practice contains a range of virtues essential to it. Before advancing this argument, however, he needs to come to terms with the scholarly literature on the subject in the recent past. As he acknowledges, for at least two generations of scholars, liberalism has been thought to have shied away from any concern with virtue. This idea has rested partly on the conviction that the functioning of the liberal order does not necessarily need individual virtues. The liberal order was something like a peace treaty among self-interested individuals allowing them to live under the roof of a single polity. There were variations on this theme and on conceptions of virtue. But that liberalism has fundamentally cut its ties with the notion of virtue went undisputed. For Strauss, says Galston, "Liberalism placed in jeopardy both the restraints on passion that should govern the daily life of the many and the striving for

excellence that should guide the activities of the few." For Pocock, liberalism stands for the decay of republican virtue, which means subordinating personal interests to the common good. According to C. Taylor, the liberal undermining of the possibility of community weakens the significance of the virtues, which are in fact habits vital for nurturing a common life. For most of these authors, any existing virtue in liberal societies is a remnant of past traditions, to which the underlying tendencies of liberalism are not hospitable. Apart from these figures in contemporary political philosophy, Galston cites a number of significant examples testifying to the steady marginalization of the virtues in political thought. Kant, the *Federalist Papers*, and A. Hirscmann's famous work on *Passions and Interests* all attest in varying ways to the gradual turning away from the virtues in politics to the question of "the proper configuration of rational self-interest."

Nevertheless, as Galston sees it, this near-consensus has started to change in recent years. He mentions a dozen scholars trying to flesh out the place of the virtues within the liberal tradition. For Galston the question centers on the fact that the liberal state must be inclusive of diversity but cannot be entirely indifferent to the character of its citizens. What is needed is an account of the individual virtues supportive of liberal institutions without jeopardizing a widely held tolerance for diversity. For his part, Galston tries to offer a deliberately modern virtue-based liberalism. This is the claim central to his project: the operation of liberal institutions and society is seriously affected by the character of its citizens, and, hence, any split between liberalism and the virtues would have fateful consequences for the survival of liberal orders, no matter how perfectly designed its mechanisms and procedures might be. Liberal virtues are immanent within liberal theory and practice in Galston's view. More interestingly, he argues that the undeniable tension between virtue and self-interest is not a tension between liberalism and any other tradition, but one within the liberal tradition itself.[8] Two lines are identified in the liberal tradition in

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[8] Apparently, he is making an allusion to MacIntyre's rival versions moral inquiry, or rival traditions. In contrast to the latter, Galston locates the tension within liberalism, which might be considered as an attempt at edging out the communitarian and the civic-republican perspectives in the debate.

terms of their approach to virtue. One is represented by J.S. Mill, who retains a place for the Aristotelian conception of virtue as an intrinsic good. The other line finds its expression in Hobbes, for whom the virtues were purely instrumental to the non-moral aims of the political life. These two attitudes can be traced up to our own time, according to Galston.[9] But, in any case, what Galston calls the liberal virtues are significantly different from the classical ones. "The liberal virtues demand less self-discipline and sacrifice than do the virtues of classical antiquity, of civic republicanism, or of Christianity," he says, adding that they "do not presuppose a specific moral psychology."

Galston first gives a sketch of the instrumental virtues, which are supposed to facilitate the healthy functioning of liberal institutions. Importantly, he states that these are not "logical entailments within liberal theory but, rather … empirical hypotheses concerning the relation between social institutions and individual character." Courage, law-abidingness, and loyalty are the instrumental virtues Galston counts. These are in fact the virtues any society might need in order to survive. But there are some virtues specific to liberal societies. There are two key characteristics of liberal societies to which correspond again two virtues: individualism and the virtue of independence, and diversity and the virtue of tolerance. Independence is the ability to take responsibility for oneself, and avoid becoming dependent on others. Yet this very independence requires other virtues and a favorable environment to flourish. For the development of an independent personality, parental care and support is vital, and this is why independence "rests on self-restraint and self-transcendence -- the virtues of family solidarity." The virtue of tolerance is the second characteristic virtue in liberal societies. It is usually relegated to some sort of relativism with respect to different ways of life. But Galston thinks that tolerance is not incompatible with the ranking of different forms of life. The issue is that this ranking cannot be turned

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[9] Rawls, for instance, always moves in-between.

into a medium of coercion. A better course is expected to emerge out of education and persuasion.[10]

Along with instrumental liberal virtues, there are individual liberal excellences held to be intrinsically good. Such a conception can be traced to a number of thinkers in the liberal tradition. The first excellence is Lockean rational liberty, or self-direction. The second is Kantian autonomy, or the capacity to act according to the requirements of duty (or moral law). The third is the "full flowering of individuality," a notion that might be traced back to Romanticism, J.S. Mill, Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman. These intrinsically valued excellences articulated by various liberal thinkers can to some extent cohere into a unified view. Individual responsibility, individual dignity, mutual respect, and excellence as an activity constitute the common core of these excellences. Still, tensions can potentially emerge in numerous ways. But the more interesting question is whether liberal accommodation of instrumental and intrinsic virtues leads to the affirmation that the good man is identical to the good citizen. Galston thinks it is not. Personal perfection may not go hand in hand with solidarity. This is the point where one of the most enduring and agonizing flash points of liberal politics shows up: namely, the tension between the requirements of liberal citizenship and the appeals to liberal excellence (or, alternatively, between means and ends).

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[10] Besides these virtues Galston introduces the virtues of the liberal economy and the virtues of liberal politics. The latter are then divided into three: the virtues of citizenship, which include respect for the rights of others, the capacity to evaluate the merits and talents of the candidates for office, moderation in demands, and self-discipline to adapt to necessary measures; the virtues of leadership, which consist of patience, ability to forge a sense of common purpose, ability to resist desire for popularity (not to pursue populist policies), the ability to balance and reconcile popular expectations with wise actions; and lastly general political virtues, which include the capacity and disposition to engage in public deliberation, and the disposition to close the gap between liberal theory and practice.

3.3. Liberal Virtues: Macedo

Macedo's *Liberal Virtues*[11] is another important attempt at substantiating the thesis that liberal theory can offer an attractive vision of virtue and community without necessarily sacrificing its fundamental principles of freedom and justice. Just like Galston, Macedo stands against reducing liberalism to a matter of coexistence, and relates the predominance of this concern within the history of the liberal tradition to what he calls liberalism's "primitive moments," when it emerged out of religious strife and sectarian divisions. Yet, minimal conditions of liberal coexistence and the primitive moments of liberalism do not exhaust liberal possibilities. Liberal justice is, in essence, a public morality that is supposed to be affirmed by citizens as a supreme moral commitment. Liberal citizens are supposed to subordinate their personal interests to public moral principles. This suggests that, implicit in the practice of liberal justice, liberal institutions, public justification, and constitutional citizenship, there are certain character traits and virtues and a liberal form of personal excellence.[12]

Macedo takes aim at certain common characterizations of liberalism in terms of disagreement and conflict, neutrality and impartiality, and toleration and the spirit of accommodation. Although the permanent fact of pluralism is crucial for any articulation of liberal theory, all these concerns are not definitive of liberalism in any strong sense. Identifying liberalism with these questions underdescribes liberal theory and conceals its own positive values embodied in and sustained by liberal institutions and practices that significantly shape or at least put powerful moral demands upon liberal citizens' lives and characters. In this regard, liberalism cannot be neutral regarding public values. The values it

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[11] Stephen Macedo, *Liberal Virtues: Citizenship, Virtue, and Community in Liberal Constitutionalism*.

[12] Macedo argues that certain processes and developments associated with modernization, such as urbanization, industrialization, and open mass markets, may support liberal virtues.

affirms are "individual liberty and responsibility, tolerance of change and diversity, [and] respect for the rights of those who respect liberal values."

In order to substantiate his thesis that there is a distinctively liberal character and way of personal excellence, Macedo brings up a number of liberal notions. One of them is the well-known public-private distinction. Macedo contends that, insofar as this distinction points to limitations on the state's coercive power in a liberal regime, it is useful in identifying the outstanding features of liberal politics. However, the same distinction might be misleading if it leads us to think that "the influence of public values on private life and personal character is neutral, or merely negative or external." On the contrary, even the most intimate relations, such as familial relations, are subject to and structured by public values. Liberal norms require interventions in the most intimate spheres of life: domestic violence, domestic rape, limits on parental authority over children, etc. "For liberals, the ends of politics are properly limited but pervasive at the same time," Macedo says, adding that they are also pervasive in the sense that "public reasons and liberal norms of respect for the rights of others override competing commitments and claim authority in every sphere of our lives." Therefore, liberal society and politics embark on the inculcation of certain character traits and attitudes.

Crucial to liberal aspirations, however, is that these character traits and liberal virtues are not enforced through the force of law. For Macedo, the enforcement of liberal justice does not necessitate liberal virtues. In fact, for him a society simply governed by liberal justice is not equal to a society flourishing in a distinctively liberal way. Yet, the preponderance of liberal virtues in a society makes it "a community flourishing in a distinctively liberal way." Respect for the rights of others, tolerance, the subordination of personal plans and commitments to impartial rules of law, having broad sympathies in the face of divergent ways of life, instilling the habit and attitude of self-criticism, reflective distance from one's loyalties, and openness to self-revision are all distinctively liberal virtues.

Now Macedo here acknowledges that these liberal virtues augment one's feelings of vulnerability and contingency regarding one's commitments and loyalties, attenuate one's pre-liberal allegiances, and interpose a measure of distance between the self and any good the self devotes itself to. "Liberal personality thrives not on a harmonious inner life, but on both internal and external value plurality, and a consequent unease and dissatisfaction." Moreover, the liberal age might have obviated other, deeper ways of attachment. But far from being a cause of worry for liberals, this dissatisfaction indicates the achievements of liberal modernity. Contrary to communitarian arguments, the liberal self is fully at home in a pluralistic society. It is not necessarily detached from all commitments, but "not inevitably, indissolubly, or unreflectively identified with any." Liberalism does not require unencumbered selves, emptied of all attachments, but rather selves who preserve a self-critical and reflective distance from their encumbrances. It is not ultimately a loss, but an achievement that "liberal affections will be broader but less intense or deep than pre-liberal ones." Here the principle of autonomy stands out. For Macedo autonomy is an important liberal virtue and it implies the possession of 'executive virtues.' Although he abstains from seeing the promotion of autonomy as a good liberal ground for government action, he affirms autonomy as an integral feature of a flourishing liberal life. He says, "The autonomous character is capable of affirming rather than bemoaning liberal modernity, with its many possible ways of life, the openness of all choices, and its protean ideal."[13] But then

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[13] Macedo's identification of autonomy with the affirmation of liberal modernity seems somewhat excessive. This gives the impression that he lacks sensitivity to various substantive critiques launched against liberal modernity from a variety of perspectives throughout the last two centuries. Even when he acknowledges some possible limitations of liberal modernity, such as "a degree of superficiality in social relations, lack of depth in commitments, eccentricity, self-absorption and even narcissism," he hastily reads these limitations ultimately as liberal achievements against some undesirable features of past or alternative conceptions of the good life. While he admits that there might indeed be forms of the good life that are simply lost or unavailable within liberal modernity, his mention of those life forms is usually framed in an apathetic tone. One cannot resist asking if this attitude is somehow related to the historical context of Macedo's writing -- namely, the end of the Cold War and the successive triumphal manner in many liberal circles. Indeed, at one point Macedo refers to a number of thinkers (Hayek, Habermas, Kristol) who, despite varying in their philosophico-political appeals, converge on the idea that liberal regimes are experiencing a legitimacy crisis, but he regards this claim as "far-fetched" given "the resurgence of liberal capitalism in the 1980s and the sudden collapse of communism." In general, Macedo's posture recalls Taylor's "boosters of modernity".

he tries to strike a balance between this stress on what he calls the "atomistic virtues" and the role of the shared values, traditions, and social practices within which autonomy arises. Thus, even for the development of autonomy and individuality one needs to be steeped in the shared values and norms of a pluralistic and tolerant culture.[14] Apparently, this is why Macedo trusts that the virtues contributing to human-individual flourishing are the same as the virtues contributing to the performance of civic duties. "Liberal virtues are both civic and personal virtues," he says, because central to the liberal project is the "aspiration to act in a manner that can be publicly justified to ourselves and to our reasonable fellow creatures."[15]

The idea of liberal virtues might be considered an advance in liberal discourse. Yet, the whole argument for liberal virtues is beset by the absence of a certain depth-dimension. The point might be put this way: The project of liberal virtues lacks attention to what some would call the expressive-affective dimension in our ethical and political life. It is too minimalist to live up to the increasingly felt significance and relevance of character and the quality of personhood in our political life. In his own way, Connolly seems to express a similar concern when he says, "Liberal virtues are often defined as if they find full expression on the highest intellectual register, as if repetition, image processing, and ritual performance are not important to their very composition and maintenance." It seems that the concern with virtue is much more diversified today. Connolly's articulation of his latest

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[14] In his invocation of tradition and practice and the role of the larger culture-framework within which individuality and autonomy is achieved, Macedo comes close to certain communitarians. But in envisioning liberal politics in terms of these aspects of the question, he prefers to refer and takes his bearings, interestingly, from Oakeshott and Durkheim.

[15] This emphasis on public justification seems questionable to some degree. Liberal demand for public justification pertains to public issues and relations to the other. In terms of the individual's choices regarding his own life, liberalism hardly expects any public justification. It seems to me that in order to counter criticisms of the liberal self as unencumbered, disembodied, or disengaged, Macedo puts forward public demands on individuals in liberal societies. But again, in terms of self-regarding choices, liberalism remains largely silent. On the other hand, as Taylor rightly points out, one needs to be careful about this talk of choice in order to avoid falling prey to a naive moral psychology. We have to attend to whether choices are really choices.

ideas in terms of the notion of civic virtue is an interesting case in point. Similarly, recent studies on the importance of "working on affective registers of experience," altering moods and gut feelings as a way of altering one's politics,[16] might be conceived as novel and surprising appearances of virtue thinking. This seems to derive us toward what we might call a micropolitics of virtue.

3.4. Aristotelian Liberalism: Beiner

As Galston's and Macedo's works testify, attempts to salvage liberalism on the battlefield of virtues depending primarily on its own resources are legion. However, the question of whether or not liberalism can animate or revitalize an aretaic ethos on its own resources is still a matter of debate. Despairing of such a prospect, other political theorists embarked on a neo-Aristotelian reconstruction of liberalism. Beiner's work *What is the Matter with Liberalism?*[17] is a case in point. Rather than launching a particularly communitarian reading and critique of liberalism, he presents a neo-Aristotelian perspective to strengthen liberal theory and practice. This is indeed the principal thesis of the work. In Beiner's view, the moral horizons of liberalism can be enlarged with a shift from a Kantian discourse of rights and autonomy to an Aristotelian discourse of virtue and character formation. In this regard, he praises Galston's work.

Beiner is particularly dissatisfied with a couple of liberal themes. These are the discourses of values, rights, and individual autonomy for a rational plan of life. The major drawback of 'values talk' is its ultimately subjectivizing character, rendering the good as a possession and determination of our subjectivity. The good thus becomes inconceivable as

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[16] See *The Politics of Moralizing* by J. Bennett and M. J. Shapiro (eds.), Routledge: 2002.

[17] Ronald Beiner, *What is the Matter with Liberalism* (University of California Press, 1992).

something we find independently of us and attach ourselves to. It becomes a possession and property of our subjectivity. Such a reductive notion brings another trouble, however, which manifests itself in the fact-value dichotomy. The discourse of values ultimately falls prey to this misleading dichotomy because it posits a world or reality deprived of intrinsic worth and goodness, on the one hand, and a subject conferring value upon things, on the other. Hence, the fact-value bifurcation is an inevitable outcome of value talk.

The primacy of the rights discourse in liberal societies has its own pitfalls. It creates an adversarial public culture and supports a self-assertive mode of social intercourse. The articulation of social and interpersonal questions in terms of rights paves the way for a litigious social life. The problem with the liberal celebration of individual autonomy, on the other hand, is that it does not represent the actual working of any society. We are already socialized into existing practices made available by our membership in a society and activities and choices are in fact ranked by any society, all making the liberal idea of unlimited individual choice regarding life styles untenable. Moreover, despite the surface pluralism of liberal societies, the actual substance of autonomy and diversity is hardly credible in those societies. Here Beiner affirmatively retrieves MacIntyre's trio: the aesthete, the manager, and the therapist. The question is not the liberal celebration of pluralism, diversity, individuality and toleration, but the fact that the kinds of individuality and plurality actually fostered in liberal societies are too often "phony," a fact to which liberals are not sufficiently sensitive.

After an overview and general critique of certain liberal notions, Beiner takes up the alternative view he endorses, which is neo-Aristotelianism. What this outlook basically holds, according to him, is that moral life is best characterized not in relation to principles distilled through the procedures of detached rationality, but in terms of concrete embodiment of certain human capacities as constitutive of a desirable life. The Greek word ethos encapsulates characteristic themes of the Aristotelian perspective: character formation, habituation to good character, and a social milieu favorable to good character and proper habituation. The idea of virtue in this schema hinges on the postulate of a

human good that is beyond human control and design. The human good is not simply apprehended by reason alone, but "rises to self-consciousness in the embodied praxis of a moral agent who makes good choices and is pleased by activities that confer worthy pleasures." Such an understanding of the human good offers criteria and possibilities for moral judgment.

This Aristotelian conception of morality, however, is untenable for liberals, primarily because the idea of an objective human good or *telos* is ultimately a sort of monism threatening diversity and pluralism. The notion of the *summum bonum*, the idea of the unity of virtues, the central role of prudence as the ruling virtue, and the endorsement of politics as the architectonic science are all, in Beiner's portrayal, reasons for liberals to remain suspicious of Aristotelianism. But Beiner nevertheless defends all of the above. In arguing that *summum bonum* and a happy life as the *telos* of human activities is not monistic, Beiner turns to art as an exemplary human concern. Every artistic creation strives for beauty, and within a certain canon one can find intelligible criteria of beauty, yet these do not necessitate or postulate any one form as the only legitimate or acceptable form of beauty. Not all good art works actualize beauty in the same way. Likewise, in our ethical life we seek happiness, but no single pattern is posited as the happy life. Yet, there are "patterns of coherence" and "goods not our own making" that are revealed through "embodied judgment."

Beiner argues that Aristotle in fact does not start by assuming a moral consensus, but, on the contrary, he refers to the fact of moral disagreement. Yet Aristotle thinks that underlying our moral disagreements we have a common quest: the life of *eudaimonia*. So Aristotelians are not unaware of moral conflicts, as liberals charge, but they move to patterns of coherence beyond or beneath our moral striving and conflicts. Furthermore, if liberals tend to view our moral ends as different in an absolute and ultimate sense, then this is not 'disagreement,' contends Beiner, but "something more like the habitation of separate moral universes." The Aristotelian schema does not negate the plurality of moral attractions impacting on us, nor does teleology commit us to a single form of the embodied life of

eudaimonia for every single human being. For Beiner, the central role of prudence in Aristotelian practical philosophy acknowledges the existence of conflicting goods in human life and affirms the resulting need to make sound judgments in the face of these conflicts. Thus, neither the Aristotelian search for harmony nor the concept of teleology necessarily commits us to a monist perspective.

After first recapitulating the overall contours of Aristotelian ethics and responding to some of its critics, Beiner then considers more directly the political challenges to Aristotelianism. These challenges, mostly liberal, are usually articulated through the notions of diversity, neutrality, or impartiality. The basic aim is to avoid the clash of rival moralities and world views. However, despite much lip service to diversity in liberal societies, a certain conception of the good is actually privileged: namely, "the maximization of individual autonomy and choice making." This is now admitted even by prominent liberal theorists such as Rawls and Larmore. The classical liberal ideal was still too metaphysically ambitious in its espousal of a certain understanding of persons and autonomy that was inconsistent with the principle of neutrality. But why, asks Beiner, then not give up the neutrality principle rather than refrain from autonomy and agency? In order to avoid metaphysics, liberalism sticks to more hard-headed thinking.[18] Beiner's major target is Larmore at this point. Against Larmore's invocation of equal respect as the basis of neutrality, Beiner asks why we should respect, say, unreflective forms of life. Without examining and engaging them, one cannot discern the merits and demerits of varying forms of life. Political liberalism as propounded by Rawls and Larmore confines our politics to a narrow concern with modus vivendi and with mutual political accommodation, or, "agreeing to disagree." Moreover, by accusing critics of liberal society of moralism, liberal thinkers misdirect the debate and, for instance, fall into difficulties making sense of MacIntyre's challenge to liberalism. The question is not deciding between monism and

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[18] Beiner regards the great classical liberals like Kant as much more honest in this regard, especially in the latter's affirmation of the necessity of a fairly ambitious philosophical anthropology in order to make advances in moral theory.

pluralism; it is not about sticking to nostalgia and pre-modern life forms or realistically embracing the inherent requirements of late modern society. It is a confrontation between two rival empirical depictions of liberal society. MacIntyre makes certain empirical claims about the current state of liberal societies, and although they are not by themselves true, they require critical examination and need to be taken seriously. These claims are mostly suspicions about the modern liberal state -- "its capacity to socialize its citizens to humanly worthwhile practices," "its ability to elicit sacrifices from its citizens," and "its vulnerability to social crises." Beiner says, "Empirically the evidence is not sufficient either to validate the worst fears of the critics of liberalism or to rule out these fears entirely."

The principle of neutrality stands as the fundamental point of contention in all these arguments. Beiner criticizes Larmore's claim that it is possible to sustain character formation, socialization into substantive forms of life, cultivating or keeping constitutive attachments, and, more generally, *Sittlickheit*, in a political public life of neutrality and agnosticism. "When the official philosophy of the society is morally agnostic," Beiner sees no compelling or good ground for our habituation to forms of virtue. Furthermore, it seems very implausible to suggest that liberal society has no ordering principles.[19] This misrepresents the character of liberal society, because it is "more organic and less neutral than liberals profess." In addition, the state will ultimately find itself obliged to pursue a moral hierarchy.[20] Even in the case of abortion, which necessitates a modus vivendi approach according to Beiner, neutrality would not be much more helpful. In such an

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[19] Beiner refers to Shklar's (*Ordinary Vices*) affirmation that liberalism does indeed have a moral ranking, but a negative ranking of vices to be avoided rather than a positive ranking of virtues to be sought. For Beiner, however, a negative ranking of vices might be read inversely so as to get a corresponding positive ranking. of virtues, tolerance being at the summit for liberal theory.

[20] Larmore's political liberalism, too, contains a moral ranking according to Beiner. The virtue of tolerance, or decency or civility, stands above in the ranking of virtues, "as all liberal political philosophers cannot help doing". Beiner then draws the conclusion, "Even liberal philosophy, as anti-Aristotelian as it tries to be, fits within an Aristotelian meta-ethic of ranking of excellences, or hierarchies of virtue". Beiner's principal objection to Larmore and other liberals is their putting "intolerable constraints on the exercise of political judgement".

intense and passionate controversy, it might be more promising to recast the "moral fabric of the terms in which the issue is debated," instead of "pretending to a spurious neutrality." Kymlicka's defense of neutrality based on the state-society distinction has similar shortcomings in Beiner 's eyes. Having a neutral state on top of a non-neutral society seems pretentious. "The liberal state is governed by the same principles of bureaucratic social organization, technocratic management, and pursuit of higher productivity that drive liberal society." Beiner thinks the principle of neutrality not only not possible for any society to actualize, but also not desirable, simply because the state's neutrality, for instance, between a self-indulgent conception of life, on the one hand, and a socially responsible and constructive, one on the other, is self-destructive.[21]

In conclusion, the Aristotelian language of human flourishing is more promising than its liberal neutralist rivals on many levels of life. However, Beiner endorses this language not for its specific content regarding political choices, but for its offering of a distinctive, paradigmatic moral vocabulary to reflect on a range of political alternatives. He brings up Aristotle's critique of Plato's attempt at reducing all goods into a singular form of 'the Good' as evidence for the possibility, held open by Aristotle himself, of construing the human telos and good in non-unitary ways. But a reasonable pluralism for Beiner requires that there be a number of life forms, liberalism being only one among others, and the relative strengths and weaknesses of these alternatives are always open to comparison and criticism. Assuming liberalism as "a kind of '*meta-*' way of life" above criticism is unacceptable.

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[21] Beiner notes that Rawls avoids using neutrality terminology because it conflates 'neutrality of aims' (state's intentions) with 'neutrality of effects' (actual policy results). As he notes, is Rawls not sympathetic to *modus vivendi* terminology because it implies an instrumentalist relation to political community rather than a moral commitment based on moral grounds.

CHAPTER 4

RESTORING THE TRADITION OF THE VIRTUES: MACINTYRE

In the preceding chapters our focus was first on aretaic minimalism and then on a number of attempts at transcending such minimalism by liberal means. Most of these attempts remain largely within the contours of a broadly liberal tradition of political philosophy. In this chapter I will turn to a post-liberal or, perhaps more accurately, an anti-liberal account of the virtues in ethics and politics in the case of Alasdair MacIntyre. I will first reconstruct the way MacIntyre strives to restore the 'tradition of the virtues,' and then examine a number of implications of his aretaic ethico-political project.

4.1. Enlightened Roots of an Emotivist Babel

MacIntyre's opening salvo against modernity right at the beginning of his sweeping moral narrative in *After Virtue* sets the tone for the bulk of the book. We are first invited to consider a "disquieting suggestion," stylized as an imaginary thought-experiment, according to which, due to a cataclysmic disaster, the intellectual and material bases of science are irretrievably lost, leaving at hand only fragments of previous scientific practices, which are no longer capable of being restored as a coherent edifice. With no sign of hesitation MacIntyre then immediately contends that what is suggested in this imaginary

world of fragmented science represents the actual moral situation of contemporary liberal modernity. Deprived of their original contexts of significance and meaning, the moral concepts and language we use constitute no more than some Babel of tongues keeping for us only a "simulacra of morality."

How can such a moral apocalypse be rendered intelligible? In order to reveal the scope of moral fragmentation today, MacIntyre points to what he sees as the three major features of contemporary moral discourse largely displayed in some of the leading moral debates of our time. The first is the conceptual 'incommensurability' between rival points of view making moral debate among them ultimately interminable, a situation which is, as MacIntyre sees it, even dignified as pluralism. The second is the multiplicity and heterogeneity of philosophical perspectives underpinning these debates bent on continuous dissensus. And the third is the widespread recourse to apparently impersonal yet, in fact, not so impersonal maxims in moral deliberation or, put differently, pretension to impersonality. But taken together these three features of the contemporary moral situation amount to a moral philosophy in its own right: namely, emotivism, which is a body of moral theory that reduces all evaluative or, more particularly, moral judgments into "expressions of preference, expressions of attitude and feeling," barring rational deliberation, let alone resolution, and thereby removing any considerable difference between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations. In other words, these features not only constitute a natural abode for contemporary emotivist culture, but also set the parameters for an emotivist moral philosophy advocated particularly by a number of analytical moral philosophers of the age.

MacIntyre locates emotivism at the center of his diagnostic purposes in his sociology of morality, interpreting it as the culmination of a long process of socio-moral disintegration. Scattered throughout contemporary emotivist culture are the fragments of earlier and originally relatively coherent moralities; and emotivism as a moral doctrine is what is philosophically distilled out of this very same culture. This is a reflection of MacIntyre's general dictum that every morality or moral philosophy presupposes a

sociology.   But how exactly is emotivism a culture in general, being besides rather than simply a particular moral doctrine? It amounts to a general culture because it is embodied in the "moral representatives" or "stock characters" of contemporary culture: who are the aesthete, who indulges in self-satisfaction; the manager, who seeks bureaucratic efficiency; and the therapist, who is involved in the manipulation of psychic-personal lives. These are *stock* characters, because they are now immediately recognizable to any audience of the social context of modernity, and they are at bottom emotive in character because each in his or her own particular context reproduces the blurring or even complete obliteration of the distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative human relations.

As already noted, this situation is the culmination of a long line of transformations going all the way back to that major transformation called the Enlightenment, which, especially in its penchant for grounding morality on a new, non-traditional, and independent basis, constitutes the social and intellectual contours of the "predecessor culture." At this point, MacIntyre's sociological-cum-philosophical analysis starts to take on a tone more akin to that of an intellectual historian. By way of a backward narrative he seeks to identify the points of escalation on the way to emotivism. The first protagonist here is Kierkegaard, whose viewpoint recognizes no independent reason relating us to the ethical unless our own choosing binds us to it. In other words, an ethical way of life is an ethical way of life only if it is endorsed by a radical choice or decision. Such ethical decisionism, which gives rise to a new literary-expressive form in the "mode of presentation" of Kierkegaard's *Either-Or*, where the author "wears a number of masks" and figures in a number of guises, however, leaves the ethical in contradiction: "How can that which we adopt for no reason have any authority over us?" In Kierkegaard, moral commitment is broken apart from any independent motive and laid to rest on subjective choice among incommensurable ways of life (in particular, between the ethical and the aesthetic).

Ethical decisionism, however, was only a response to an earlier moral feat associated with the towering figure of the Enlightenment, namely, Kant, whose stark dissociation of

rational morality or a priori moral imperatives from desires and inclinations deprived morality of substantive content. More specifically, Kant's attempts at deriving the categorical imperative on purely logical-rational premises and without recourse to traditional touchstones such as 'happiness' or 'divine will' pressed him into logical inconsistencies and into a moral framework devoid of content. On the other hand, when the categorical imperative was given some content, as in the case of its second formulation (treating every human being as an end in itself), this time the whole moral framework lapsed into what it was avoiding at the outset: a prudential reference to happiness. What is manifest here according to MacIntyre is the ultimate failure of attempts at justifying morality on the basis of reason, which recognizes "no criterion external to itself," a failure Kant personified with great accomplishment.[1] Kierkegaard inherits this failed attempt at justifying morality on the basis of reason, together with traditional maxims of ethics. In fact, he shared with Kant the same traditional moral principles, principles embraced by any plain person, like promise keeping and not lying, though without resolution as to their ultimate philosophical grounding. Against this background, Kierkegaard's contrast between the ethical and the aesthetic largely reincarnates Kant's segregation between the sphere of morality and the sphere of happiness, or between self-determination and self-gratification, respectively, by relocating the basis of the ethical from reason to radical decision, where "Kierkegaardian choice [is] a surrogate for Kantian reason."[2] Kant's moral philosophy, in turn, clearly did not emerge in a vacuum; it was largely inflamed against attempts at grounding morality in passions and sentiments by a host of thinkers, from Diderot to Hume, whose meticulous distinctions between enlightened and unenlightened, or between long-term and short-term interests and desires were of no avail, because by discriminating between desires they were undermining their own attempts at vindicating morality on the basis of human physiological nature.

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[1] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 45.

[2] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 47.

Now, according to this narrative, from Kierkegaard back to Diderot all the prominent figures of the predecessor culture are linked up through a chain of responses to preceding failures in grounding morality; the failure of the last protagonist thereby reflecting the failure of the first, and the failure of them all reflecting the failure of the predecessor culture at large. Following this general indictment, MacIntyre draws closer attention to some problematic aspects of the Enlightenment legacy in order to show why its project of justifying morality "had to fail." On his account, despite their differences of emphasis, all the Enlightenment thinkers shared the same structure of argument in their justification of morality. All moved from what they understood as the relevant feature of human nature to the same moral precepts available to any plain person. For Diderot and Hume the relevant feature of human nature was the passions, for Kant it was reason, and moral philosophy basically consisted in justifying morality by establishing the relation between the relevant feature and the precepts of morality. The structure of the argument, then, was largely shared among these philosophers. However, this argument structure lacked certain crucial concepts, which were characteristic of the broadly Aristotelian moral framework that was the historical ancestor to Enlightenment philosophies. What stands out as the most critical feature of the classical Aristotelian framework is the teleological understanding of man and reason. Moral life, from this perspective, was conceived as structured in terms of the natural ends or *telos* of man, which were in principal transparent to human reason and understanding. Moral life was governed by natural ends, establishing an axiological distance between 'man-as-he-happens-to-be' and 'man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature,' and human reason was capable of grasping those ends. In this regard, the classical legacy did not regard untutored human nature as definitive in moral thinking unless its natural potentialities were taken into consideration. As a social corollary to this, 'man' in this framework was mainly a teleological concept designating a set of roles for each and every person according to his or her station in life. On the other hand, seen from within the horizon shared by the Enlightenment thinkers, such an account of reason and teleology was already discredited. The ends of man were opaque to reason, and human nature was set loose from teleological considerations. In such a state of affairs the task of

moral philosopher was to establish a grounding relation between human nature and abstract moral precepts. But if reason is incapable of conceiving ends it turns purely instrumental, and if human nature is devoid of its teleological context, moral thinking falls back upon the problem of the 'naturalistic fallacy' of deriving 'ought' from 'is.' And even when the notion of teleology in the form of 'a presupposition of pure practical reason' was accorded some space by Kant, this partial move was later considered by his followers, the neo-Kantians, as an unjustifiable compromise.[3] Hence the abortive character of the Enlightenment project.

4.2. Epochal Options: Nietzsche or Aristotle

Now, what are we to make of this? Where are we in our moral itinerary today? In providing a response to these questions, MacIntyre offers another disquieting suggestion, notoriously comparing the present-day condition of modern normative concepts such as *good*, *right*, and *obligatory* and modern moral imperatives, some of them being particularly cherished by the moderns, like "human rights," to Polynesian 'taboo' rules. Even though this might at first seem to be going a bit too far, soon we discover that the moral of the analogy is to reiterate, surely with some measure of provocation, the portrayal of the situation of contemporary moral culture suggested at the outset: various moral concepts and ideas from past moralities existing side by side as fragments without coming into a coherent form. Just like the taboo rules, broken off from from their underlying, most likely ancient, rationale that once made them constitutive of an intelligible totality, stood as survivals from a bygone age with no connection to a context of significance until some Kamehameha II came and eventually expunged them, modern moral imperatives are shorn of any rationally defensible structure of coherence, a fact ultimately exposed by the

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[3] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 56.

subversive revelations of Nietzsche. At this point, MacIntyre asks why we shouldn't see Nietzsche, who had after all ventured with such vehemence to repudiate the values of liberal modernity, as the Kamehameha of the European tradition. Nietzsche's achievement lies not only in having exposed "that what purported to be appeals to objectivity were in fact expressions of subjective will" but also in pursuing this problem until he was able to draw its fateful implications for the morals of the modern age: "If there is nothing to morality but expressions of will, my morality can only be what my will creates, [and] there can be no place for such fictions as natural rights, utility, the greatest happiness of the greatest number."[4] Nietzsche is "the moral philosopher of the present age," epitomizing in his prophetic pronouncements the age's drift toward a moral wilderness under the sway of emotivism and bureaucratic-managerial relations.[5]

But if Nietzsche represents the culmination of the present age (or modernity), Aristotle, by having been repudiated by the age of which Nietzsche is the philosophical culmination, represents the only possible option in morals today. After a chain reaction of moral failures we come full circle to the classical way of posing the ethical problematic, for perhaps the initial repudiation of the Aristotelian tradition was mistaken in the first place. In MacIntyre's words:

> It was because a moral tradition of which Aristotle's thought was the intellectual core was repudiated during the transitions of the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries that the Enlightenment project of discovering new rational secular foundations for morality had to be undertaken. And it was because that project failed, because the views advanced by its most intellectually powerful protagonists, and more especially by Kant, could not be sustained in the face of rational criticism that Nietzsche and all his existentialist

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[4] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, pp. 113-4

[5] As a sociological counterpart to Nietzsche's revelations about the present age, MacIntyre gives primary focus to Weberian sociology and, to a lesser extent, Goffman's sociology of everyday life. The latter provides an account of small-scale counterparts, "in the mundane transactions of everyday life," to Nietzsche's and Weber's large-scale theoretical articulations of modernity.

and emotivist successors were able to mount their apparently successful critique of all previous morality.[6]

Such an account of the history of morals would, according to MacIntyre, by itself suffice to cast doubt on the validity of the initial discrediting of the Aristotelian tradition and would lend credence to attempts at recapturing the fundamental insights of that tradition. Indeed, there is no third alternative, or live option: "Either one must follow through the aspirations and collapse of the different versions of the Enlightenment until there remains only the Nietzschean problematic, or one must hold that the Enlightenment project was not only mistaken, but should never have been commenced in the first place. There is no third alternative."[7]

Now it is clear that MacIntyre is in agreement with Nietzsche so far as the latter unmasks modern morality, for he sees the Nietzschean unmasking of the Enlightenment heritage as a warrant for rehearsing the classical concerns of ethics and politics. There is even agreement on the central terms in which the ethical problematic should be defined: the question of the good life. Therefore, both in what is sometimes called the 'unmasking business' and in recentering the ethical problematic on the question of the good life, MacIntyre goes some considerable distance alongside Nietzsche. In fact, he goes along with Nietzsche to such an extent led some commentators contend that Macintyre in many ways, though unwittingly, propagates Nietzsche, showing the cogency of the latter's perspective.[8]

MacIntyre is famous, or perhaps notorious, for framing and inserting surprising juxtapositions at crucial moments in his narrative, heightening the overall dramatic effect: Nietzsche or Aristotle; Trotsky or St. Benedict; Nietzsche and Kamehameha II. But juxtaposing Nietzsche (and post-Nietzscheans) with emotivism (and emotivists) is a

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[6] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 117.

[7] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 118.

[8] Richard Bernstein, "Nietzsche or Aristotle? Reflections on Alasdair MacIntyre's After Virtue," *Soundings* 67 (1984), pp. 6-29.

relatively persistent feature of MacIntyre's works. He seems to present emotivism, as a moral doctrine, as the analytical counterpart to post-Nietzschean currents of thought. But, more than that, he presents emotivism, as a widespread cultural attitude or mood, as the social embodiment and therefore the vindication of Nietzschean insights into the spirit of modern morals. This might still mislead one to consider such juxtaposition an instance of equal treatment and to therefore judge it unfair due to its failure to distinguish the dissimilar in the similar, which is one of the golden rules of the Aristotelian conception of justice. This is not the case, however, because MacIntyre specifies two crucial differences between these two moral visions. One major difference consists in the divergent conclusions each draws from their underlying agreement regarding the truth of morality. Although they are in agreement in seeing morality and its appeal to impersonality as an ensemble of personal attitudes and preferences in disguise, the emotivist sees no reason for abandoning the project of morality as it currently works, whereas the post-Nietzschean believes and affirms that anyone awakened to the truth of morality cannot help but ultimately renounce it. Secondly, and more pointedly, whereas the emotivist stands, for the most part, on a line that can be traced back to Hume, that is, the moral doctrine of passions and sentiments, the post-Nietzschean comprehends morality in the register of "the psychology and sociology of resentment, frustration, and distortion," thereby considering any philosophy that leaves morality as it is both in complicity with the very same conditions of resentment and blinded by their reign.[9] Therefore, their juxtaposition does not mean giving equal consideration to these two standpoints. On the contrary and more importantly, MacIntyre treats 'genealogy' as a rival tradition to the Aristotelian one along with the Enlightenment tradition; but approaches emotivism only for diagnostic purposes, for a diagnosis of the modern moral *Zeitgeist*. All this might lend some credence to Bernstein's contention about MacIntyre's relation to Nietzsche. But, then, against all this background, MacIntyre initiates his

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[9] MacIntyre, "Moral Philosophy and Contemporary Social Practice," in *The Tasks of Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 105-22.

principal project of retrieving and calrifying the Aristotelian moral framework or the tradition of the virtues in general.

4.3. Reconstruction of the Virtue Tradition

The virtue tradition consists in a highly layered and extended stream of ideas, practices, and concepts covering a multiplicity of periods and civilizations. In retrieving this tradition, MacIntyre tries to do justice to its layered and complex character and recounts the story of the virtues as it distinctively evolved from Homeric times through the archaic and the classical periods down to the Middle Ages.

The social world of "heroic societies" depicted in the Homeric epic poems rested on a structure of kinship relations according each member of the community some specific roles in the maintenance of the community and the heroic excellence of its members. In such a social context the vocabulary of the virtues was also unambiguously tied to the role structure of the community, with each role signifying relevant actions and performances expected of it and open to judgment in terms of their excellence in occupying the role in question. Among the constellation of virtues prevailing at the time, the virtue of courage was given pride of place due to the warrior ethos of Homeric times. The Homeric ethic was an instance of the warrior ethic centering on the virtue of courage and the related virtues of loyalty and comradeship. But courage and the related virtues, such as strength, were the order of the day not only because of their, say, martial importance, but also because of their larger cosmic human implications, that is, their meaning and importance for man in the face of fate and in view of every man's nemesis, death. In this respect, perhaps the Homeric virtues are better seen as *virtu* in the face of *fortuna*.

Given the profile of the Homeric age and society as a warrior society structured along kinship lines of solidarity,[10] one could regard its promises for any broadening or improvement of our understanding of the virtues with suspicion. Yet according to MacIntyre the whole picture offers us glimpses of two important features of any viable ethics: the situatedness of any livable morality in local or particular contexts and the crucial, even indispensable, role of tradition as the wellspring of the virtues. In MacInyre's words, "All morality is always to some degree tied to the socially local and particular." He adds, "There is no way to possess the virtues except as part of a tradition in which we inherit them and our understanding of them from a series of predecessors, in which series heroic societies hold first place."

The understanding of the virtues as excellences in Homeric societies does not allow any distance between social structure and morality, because the demands of morality conform to the demands of social structure. In this regard, Homeric society represents another example of the partial or restricted understanding of the virtues we ascribed, with reference to Aristotle, to the Spartans in the previous chapter. Virtues as excellences revolve around the heroic code of the warrior ethic and thus breed mainly the heroic virtues, exalting fame, glory, and the immortality that these only could bestow on man.

But by the time of classical Athens, the tradition of the virtues had already started to expand, increasingly branching out toward divergent versions. In classical Athens four different schools of thought were already arguing with each other as to the nature of the virtues: the Sophists, the tragedians, Plato, and Aristotle. Yet this four-fold diversification was still sustained by the relatively unifying world of the *polis*. In the Sophist understanding, analogous to modern day emotivism, the virtues primarily figured within the

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[10] In his account of Homeric ethics MacIntyre largely draws upon the work of Moses Finley, who, in his history and sociology of the Homeric period, stresses the centrality of the "heroic code," completely and unambiguously constituting the moral framework of the people of the Homeric age. On the other hand, Finley's description has been criticized as overemphasizing the import of the heroic code at the expense of other codes emergent or even already at play in the Homeric society. For a discussion, see Carey Seal, "MacIntyre and the Polis," *Analyse & Kritik* 30 (2008), pp. 5-16.

terms of an ethics of personal success, self-gratification, and self-interest. With Plato and the tragedians, on the other hand, the virtues and one's ethical standing in the world started to be seen in terms of correspondences between psychic and cosmic orders; Plato articulating in the main a compatibilist account, whereas the tragedians for the most part gave voice to experiences of discord and strife among equally compelling virtues and goods.

It is in Aristotle that the tradition of the virtues finds its most elaborate spokesman during the classical period, establishing its influence as a benchmark for almost all the subsequent literature on ethics throughout much of medieval times up until the early modern period. But this millennial influence harbors subtle twists and turns and certain inner transformations in conceptions of the virtues. Aristotle's ethics revolves around two key elements: human nature and the *telos* of a characteristically human form of life, which is referred to in the tradition as *eudaimonia*. The meaning and role of the virtues are intelligible only given these key features of human existence. The virtues are required in order to proceed well in the way of attaining this distinctive human telos, or eudaimonia, which, however, does not mean that the virtues are instrumental to the attainment of eudaimonia, but rather that they are constitutive of such state of "being-well and doing well." Proceeding well in this domain means gradual seasoning or habituation of human character, or character formation, a process that does not consist merely in initiation into given conventions or entrenched habits but, on the contrary, involves the cultivation and sharpening of the deliberative faculties and powers. Although the life of the polis provided an indispensable abode or concrete context for such ethical formation, such situated character-formation did not negate, but required deliberative choice.

Because MacIntyre is a self-avowed Aristotelian and has contributed a great deal to the revival of neo-Aristotelian ethics and politics, the way he critically appropriates Aristotle and the ways in which he finds Aristotle promising and wanting are worth focusing on. Although MacIntyre is an Aristotelian through and through, he finds Aristotle's views lacking in some crucial respects. First of all, the notion of the unity of the

virtues Aristotle receives from his mentor Plato is untenable in any of its strong forms. Yet there is still some plausible core to this idea, particularly if we consider the interrelationship or reversibility of the virtues we mentioned in the previous chapter. What is more important and problematic in relation to the Aristotelian notion of the unity of the virtues, however, is its lack of sensitivity to the tragic in human life. In the broadly Platonic-Aristotelian vision, the order of the city and the order of the soul (or character) are strongly connected to the unity of the virtues, and accordingly the lack of such unity is attributed either to wrong political arrangements or to character flaws. But, if this is the case, the tragic dimension of the human condition is ignored or at least explained away. "The *agon* has been displaced from its Homeric centrality." "The conflict of good with good," prior to any character formation, is lost from view in such an ethical understanding, thereby depriving its holders of an important resource and milieu for the practice and formation of the virtues, because it is sometimes only through conflict and contestation that one can get a clear grasp of the ends towards which one's ethical strivings are directed.[11] This exclusion of the tragic was only aggravated by Aristotle's profiling of certain sorts of human beings and of certain kinds of human activities outside the landscape of the virtues. Aristotle considered slaves and barbarians incapable of cultivating the virtues and achieving the human good. He also saw craftsmanship and manual labor as inferior activities the excellences of which did not figure into his compendium of the virtues. Here MacIntyre identifies and underlines Aristotle's postulation or stipulation of freedom as the "presupposition of the exercise of the virtues and the achievement of the good." The virtues and the human good are available only to free man in their free activities. But this stipulation is severely constrained by Aristotle's ahistorical understanding of human nature (and human *telos*) as fixed with respect to one's position in the dominant forms of social and cultural hierarchies of the

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[11] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 157-64. The question of *agon* in Aristotle's politics has recently been revived in fruitful ways. For an exemplary study see Steven C. Skultety, "Competition in the Best of Cities: Agonism and Aristotle's *Politics*," Political Theory v.37 n.1 (2009), pp. 44-68. For an earlier discussion see Bernard Yack, *The Problems of a Political animal: Community, Justice, and Conflict in Aristotelian Political Thought* (University of California Press, 1993).

time. This ahistorical conception with an aristocratic tinge prevailing in the tradition of the virtues as it culminated in Aristotle during the classical period did not undergo any major alteration until its medieval encounters with religion.

The Middle Ages represent the time period during which the virtue tradition underwent a host of transformations in response not only to monotheistic religion, but also to the pagan cultures of Europe. Although these pre-Christian cultures were later Christianized, their warrior ethic survived in a new cultural milieu, wrapping the pagan warrior king in the persona of the Christian knight. What is interesting here is that the heroic code, which was once superseded or given a secondary role in the tradition, now reemerged in Christianized form, giving to the heroic code sort of a "double presence" in the tradition of the virtues. However, the main drama in the history of medieval ethics in this context is the encounter between classical Aristotelian thought and religious visions and theology, an encounter which is in fact part of the larger story of the encounter between Jerusalem and Athens. This encounter constituted a highly favorable ground for cross-fertilization between the two traditions but, specifically for the tradition of the virtues, theology or the Abrahamic religions in general meant a broadening both in the catalogue of the virtues and of its thematic composition. To the classical catalogue of the virtues now were added new virtues like such as faith, hope, and charity (with Aquinas), and some classical virtues were either sidelined, radically transformed or totally abandoned, like such as the ancient virtue of *megalopsuchia,*[12] translated as pride, magnanimity or, in more recent renditions, greatness of soul, which is not considered to be in line with the Christian virtue of humility. To the thematic composition were now added questions like sin or, more generally, an emphatic conception of evil.

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[12] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1123a35-1125a35. MacIntyre, as most others, regards as less than satisfactory the usual translations of certain key Greek moral terms such as *eudaimonia* and *megalopsuchia*.

4.4. A Core Conception of the Virtues

This rich and layered account of the tradition of the virtues seems to offer us not exactly one tradition, but rather many contending, or at least divergent, traditions of the virtues. A chief achievement of MacIntyre's work is to draw out of this rich tapestry of pre-modern virtue-ethical perspectives what he calls a "core conception of the virtues." What is intended by a core conception here is not a monolithic body of ideas. Rather, it is in itself multilayered and multidimensional. As we have seen, from the outset, MacIntyre pointed to the manifold meaning and usage of the notion of virtue as it was used by a plethora of past thinkers. In Homer a virtue is what enables one to discharge one's social role; in Aristotle it enables one to achieve the characteristic telos of human life; in Benjamin Franklin it amounts to being an instrumental quality for achieving earthly or heavenly success.[13] Thus, not only in their catalogue of the virtues but also in their rank-ordering and in their conceptions of them, they differ considerably. Yet, MacIntyre endeavors to take us beyond this manifold meaning of virtue and highlight some commonalities, or unifying elements, running through all these divergent accounts of the virtues. As he specifies, there are three common elements in any understanding of the virtues. The first is the notion of practice; the second is the narrative order of a human life; and the third is the notion of a (moral) tradition.

The notion of 'practice' as the first element of the core conception gives us a profile of the immediate background of our moral life and locates the virtues therein. In MacIntyre's renowned portrayal, a practice refers to

> any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human
> activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the

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[13] In order to highlight the extent of dissonance between varying conceptions of the virtues MacIntyre in a somewhat ironic vein speculates that "Aristotle would certainly not have admired Jesus Christ and he would have been horrified by St Paul"; p. 184.

course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.[14]

So construed, the concept of practice covers an extensive range of relatively complex human activities: games like football and chess; artistic or semi-artistic activities such as painting, music, and architecture; productive and professional activities like farming; intellectual activities like the natural and social sciences; and activities like sustaining a household or family and engaging in politics in the Aristotelian sense.

The notion of 'internal goods,' or 'goods internal to practice,' as opposed to those that are external to it, is very important in this context. Certain types of goods can only be acquired through and in the context of a practice to which the goods in question are in a constitutive relation. Such goods are not external additions to, or supervenient on, practices; they are rather inscribed into the very possibility and meaning of practice. Otherwise stated, certain goods disclose themselves and become available to us only through certain practices harboring them.

MacIntyre proposes the example of portrait painting in order to expand upon the relation of the virtues to human practices and internal goods. Money and reputation can be obtained through painting, but they can also be secured in a variety of ways other than painting. However, excellence in painting in general, or the characteristic attributes of a virtuoso painter, like a good sense of perspective, for instance, not to mention the qualities acquired due to a whole life lived as a painter, one may cultivate only through painting; that is, in and through the practice itself. It is in this sense that certain goods are internal to the practices disclosive of them, but others, such as money and reputation, are merely or primarily external. Similarly, a special "analytical skill, strategic thinking, and competitive intensity," constitute a particular range of goods internal to the practice we call chess, quite apart from potential external goods we may obtain through it, such as fame or prestige.

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[14] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 187.

Crucially, this feature of internal goods is also what renders their achievement a shared good for the whole community in which they are achieved, because internal goods are objects of or relevant practices harboring them provide an arena for striving for excellence. On the other hand, external goods are, for the most part or even always, someone's property and they are objects of possessive competition. For this reason in later works MacIntyre refers to the same distinction with better terminology: "goods of excellence" versus "goods of effectiveness."[15]

Internal goods are thus related to practices, but where and how do the virtues stand in relation to practices and the internal goods correlated with them? In MacIntyre's practice-based conception of the virtues, "a virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods." MacIntyre identifies three main virtues that are particularly important for achieving internal goods and sustaining practice: justice, courage, and truthfulness or honesty. But how are these virtues exactly related to practices? Every practice in its complexity is a locus of relationships, first of all among practitioners and secondly among any other relevant persons. Additionally, every practice, from sports games to arts and sciences, has a relatively long history during which a host of standards of excellence is already constituted by past or present practitioners of the practice in question. Arguably, it is in fact part of many human practices to amplify and advance already established standards of excellence to new, higher levels. But this all indicates that participation in a practice means some exposure both to a possibly large number of practitioners and their evaluations, on the one hand, and a certain cluster of standards of excellence definitive of the achievement of that practice, on the other.

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[15] MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which rationality?* (Notre Dame University Press, 1988). MacIntyre's description of practice and its components in terms of internal goods and external goods or goods of excellence and goods of effectiveness created a great deal of interesting debate in the fields of management and organizational studies, where these two type of goods are in fact fairly intricately related, even embroiled in one other. For an interesting piece on the question of whether "business" is a practice see Ron Beadle, "Why Business Cannot Be a Practice", *Analyse and Kritik* 30/2008, pp. 229-41.

What does this, in turn, mean aretaically? It means that such an exposure to what any practice involves in terms of practitioners and standards of excellence will only be fruitful if the individual who is so exposed earns and executes the capacity "to recognize what is due to whom" (justice), bears or fosters in himself the dispositional qualities to withstand and persist in face of challenges and risks (courage), and implants in himself the readiness "to listen carefully to what we are told about our own inadequacies and to reply with the same carefulness for the facts" (honesty). If I am a novice at playing chess I have to be open to suggestions and even guidance from other more experienced practitioners, recognizing their rightful authority in this domain, but I have also to meet challenges of the game in the face of competition. Given the broad range of activities included under the concept, these relatively common features of various practices would most likely take on differential weights with respect to different practices, and possibly more weight in so far as the practice in question is much more complicated in terms of inter-human relations and the range of concerns it embodies than a game like chess. Dispositional qualities required for mastery in chess would certainly figure in a different light and probably gain some more force to be effective in the field of political practice, for instance. To use the metaphor we mentioned in a previous chapter, these qualities (justice, courage, honesty) would figure in the 'magnetism' of a different field, namely politics, and would thus generate a different magnetism among themselves (the virtues). But in the main they would be cardinal features of most human practices.

What is also worth noting here is that the virtues figuring in a practice constitute also the key to the quality of human relationships formed or organized around that practice. This is to say that the virtues which are sustained by and in turn sustain practices are not only our ways to internal and external goods or only to the success and vitality of practices, but they are also crucial in keeping human relations revolving around practices in good ethical shape. Justice, courage, and honesty define our relations with other people as well as our qualifications regarding various practices.

94

Now, it is easy to see from this account of practices that we live most of our waking lives participating in a number of such activities and, to the extent that we cultivate the requisite virtues and are successful in achieving the relevant internal goods accruing to the practices in which we participate, we contribute both to our own well-being and to the larger social or human whole in which those practices find a home. All the practices in which we participate constitute the immediate background for our ethical experiences, endeavors, and achievements and, therefore, for the cultivation and formation of the virtues. But in its multiplicity this immediate sphere of practices does not meet the full range of our ethical aspirations. In other words, in its heterogeneity any array of practices would fall short of matching the relatively unitary perspective we usually, yet perhaps sometimes implicitly, try to project on our lives.

This perspective or horizon of unity is opened up for us, according to MacIntyre, in terms of the narrative profiles in which we see our lives. It is in terms of our individual life-story that we can gain access to a more unitary perspective of our lives. Our embroilment in the particular history which is our life story makes us move within a temporal horizon that includes all our struggles, achievements, failures, and losses. The sphere of practices then becomes intelligible and virtue-evaluable only in this sphere of narrative horizons. Whether what is deemed to be virtuous in the context of a practice – and therefore is our locus of moral concern – amounts to a genuine character trait in us, whether various internal goods or goods of excellence to which we aspire come to constitute a solid feature of our lives, in short whether our lives are leading us anywhere worth our commitment and allegiance, all can only be rendered intelligible from within such a narrative grasp. In MacIntyre's words, "The unity of a virtue in someone's life is intelligible only as a characteristic of a unitary life, a life that can be conceived and evaluated as a whole." The first and immediate background of our ethical bearing is in this way comprehended by a wider personal life horizon or context.

Both the practices in which we participate and the narratives in which we conceive our courses of life define our relationship to virtues and goods. If practices provide us with

arenas where we can come to acquire and develop virtues, narrative identity puts us in relation to virtues and goods with a higher level of unity. Just like practices, however, narratives are not unitary, and this is not because of the banal fact that we can come to regard our lives in varying narrative portrayals, but because our self-narrative is already enmeshed in an interlocking set of other narratives that altogether body forth a moral tradition, which is the third element of the core conception of the virtues. Moreover, not only do human beings as practitioners have narratives or stories, but even practices have stories of their own which involve many times and many people. In other words, not only persons but also practices have a storied existence finding their widest possible meaning and coherence in traditions. As MacIntyre says, "The individual's search for his or her good is generally and characteristically conducted within a context defined by those traditions of which the individual's life is a part, and this is true both of those goods which are internal to practices and of the goods of a single life."

4.5. Contexts of Aretaic Coherence: Practices, Narratives, Traditions

Now, clearly the core conception of virtue MacIntyre distills from the tradition of the virtues is primarily harnessed to restore and reinstitute a context of coherence for the practice of the virtues and for moral life in general.   Practices are indispensable for the existence of the virtues because, with their shared, relatively stable, well-established standards of excellence and attitudinal requisites (together with their exemplary virtuoso), they provide a context of normative coherence for the practitioners and the virtues. Narratives and narrative self-understanding lend some evaluative coherence with respect to the goods and aretaic achievements of a single human life. And, finally, traditions lend some historical coherence and intelligibility to our practices and narrative quests by projecting practices and narratives as situated in an unfolding historical story of developments, advances and declines or setbacks. Therefore, the whole framework is

steered to lead us towards some rehabilitation of moral coherence by counteracting the moral cacophony consequent upon that came with the Enlightenment initiatives adumbrated described above. Since these concepts are so central into MacIntyre's invitation to recuperate the virtues, I would like to take up each in turn to assess their promises and shortcomings in a way pertinent to my purposes here.

MacIntyre's moral sociology of practices is highly suggestive and illuminating, particularly in showing the place and sources of the virtues in the concrete fabric of our moral life. By maintaining concrete contexts for the cultivation of the virtues, practices constitute what are sometimes called the seedbeds of the virtues. In subscribing or exposing themselves to the standards of excellence embodied in practices, individuals undergo a self-transformative process, and they partake in a life of larger meaning than their emotive or preferential allegiances.[16] Borrowing from Oakeshott, practices are the primary arenas of "self-enactment" and "self-disclosure' enmeshed in "durable human relations."[17] But any strong affirmation of such a concept of practice as an ongoing complex of activities embodying rules and standards of excellence awaiting practitioners' espousal and mastery would raise questions of conventionalism in ethics. Given that the pivots of any practice are the internal goods and excellences it sustains, one could ask if there is any measure to evaluate the relevant practice other that the inner criteria it embodies. This question becomes even more complicated if we consider the possibility that there might be bad, deformed, or evil practices, or evils engendered by practices. Taking their bearings from Foucault and a number of other critical theorists, E. Frazer and N. Lacey reveal how

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[16] In terms of larger philosophical concerns, MacIntyre's conception of practices parallels the post-subjectivist call to "begin with practices, not consciousness," as H. Dreyfus puts the matter; see the latter's "Reflections on the Workshop on 'The Self,' Anthropology and Humanism Qarterly 16 (1991), p. 27; cited in David Stern, "Practices, Practical Holism, and Background Practices" in Mark Wrathall and Jeff Malpas (eds.) *Heidegger, Coping, and Cognitive Science* (MIT Press, 2000), pp. 53-71.

[17] Michael Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct* (Clarendon Press, 1999 [1975]) pp. 23-24, 59.

practices and their internal goods could be tailored to power differentials, thereby unnecessarily restraining those who are subject to them.[18]

Now MacIntyre's conception of the matter is surely less vocal about this underside of practices and this diminishes its capacity to account for the shifts and conversions away from certain practices in the past. This is because internal goods and the "social teleology" of a practice would not count as sufficient warrant for much of a change in cases such as the civil rights movement and the abolition of slavery. Although at one point MacIntyre considers the possibility of evil practices and holds open such a possibility, he is in general unwilling to lend much credence to this idea.

Some theorists who are emphatic on the role of practices in ethical conduct grapple with this range of problems having recourse to certain normative distinctions. In his recent works J. Raz distinguishes between the contingent coming into existence of values depending on social practices, on the one hand, and their value status, on the other. Once they are in existence values are capable of acquiring autonomy from their originally "sustaining practices" and, therefore, even in the absence of practices, that is, even in cases where the relevant practices die out, values can remain alive or they can later be revived. As a corollary to this idea Raz also separates a set of values which he thinks are independent of what he calls the "social dependence" of values on practices. The paradigm example of this kind of value is freedom, which, Raz argues, is an "enabling condition" and "no sustaining practice is necessary to make it possible."[19] With these moves Raz tries to attenuate the practice-based status of excellences and goods and to keep certain goods from the contingencies of social practices. Oakeshott provides a similar outcome by restricting the scope of practices to embodying adverbial rules rather than substantive purposes.

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[18] Elisabeth Frazer and Nicola Lacey, "MacIntyre, Feminism and the Concept of Practice" in J. Horton and S. Mendus (eds.), *After MacIntyre* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), pp. 265-82.

[19] Joseph Raz, *The Practice of Value* (Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 15-59, 34.

MacIntyre, too, acknowledges the contingent beginning of practices (and traditions). He is, it seems to me, much more concerned about deformations in practices than the above authors and he recognizes the possibility of change and transformation in practices. Especially as to the last point MacIntyre stresses the role of practitioners in negotiating the nature of internal goods and their ability to sharpen practices toward a better grasp of the relevant goods of excellence. In most games or arts, for instance, it is players' or artists' mastery and achievement that takes the art or the game in question toward a higher level of accomplishment, broadening and enriching the horizons of the practice. MacIntyre provides interesting examples from the history of the arts (especially painting) and certain games in this respect.[20] But, as can be seen, this is about the progress of practices, not about their deformation, let alone their evils, and the vector of transformation is still determined or guided by goods internal to practices. In comparison with other thinkers who offer a practice-based account of goods and excellences (like Raz and Oakeshott), then, MacIntyre stands more emphatic on the indispensability of practices (Raz, for instance, strives to open some normative crack in the nexus of practices and goods).

In dealing with the deformation problem, however, MacIntyre has recourse to the distinction between practices and institutions mentioned above. Although the primary components of a practice are its internal goods and standards of excellence, most practices deliver or are capable of delivering goods external to them, such as status, prestige, and power, which exposes them to potential corruption and deformation under the sway of institutions primarily bent on procuring external goods. As Knight notes, at the root of this distinction lies, among other things, MacIntyre's first-person experience of academic life in university settings, where, the latter thinks, the internal goods of scholarly work and activities are under constant jeopardy due to the institutional interests of the universities in

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[20] MacIntyre, "Colors, Cultures, and Practices" in *The Tasks of Philosophy Selected Essays Volume 1* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 24-52.

meeting the demands and expectations of the market and a knowledge-based economy.[21] But the problem extends towards many other practices working within the managerial networks of institutions where goods of excellence are in tension with technical-bureaucratic imperatives, as can be observed in the over-commercialization of sports. And in MacIntyre's portrayal capitalism at large enervates the practice character of some key human activities, like production, because it creates conditions in which people engage in activities without internal goods. MacIntyre's distinction between practices and institutions is again a useful one and it joins varied criticisms of the hold of instrumental reason and alienation in modern settings, but it is still difficult to see how this could cover those practices the evils of which cannot neatly be imputed to institutional invasion.

MacIntyre in general counts on the internal resources of practices for providing the requisite grounds for criticism of wrong-headed practices unless they are not totally exhausted by institutions and, for this reason, resists standards external to or independent of practices, or notions like 'transcending goods,' which C. Taylor incorporates in his own ethics of the good.[22] But MacIntyre's Thomistic turn in the aftermath of *After Virtue* seems to afford him the final philosophical leverage to shore up the internal resources of practices: precepts of natural law. This turn to natural law opens up a new dimension in MacIntyre's practice-based moral framework because it adds to it a new normative input beyond internal goods. In this way the centrality of internal goods is somewhat moderated. By the precepts of natural law MacIntyre understands some basic rules and principles to which anyone should attend for the sound functioning and healthy maintenance of practices and human relations, and in this he comes interestingly close to Raz's description of them as

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[21] Kelvin Knight, *Aristotelian Philosophy: Ethics and Politics from Aristotle to MacIntyre* (Polity Press, 2007), p. 144. The question of the 'university' has always been a central preoccupation for MacIntyre; his most recent statement on the topic can be found in his *God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009).

[22] MacIntyre, "A Partial Response to My Critics" in J. Horton and S. Mendus (eds.), *After MacIntyre* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), p. 290.

'enabling conditions,' by characterizing the precepts of natural law as "enabling rules."[23] These rules enjoins us not to commit a certain range of harms to others and thus enables all of us to participate in activities and practices within a safety net, thereby shielding not only human beings and their relations, but also the pursuit of goods through common projects against deformation and breakdown. "The precepts of the natural law," says MacIntyre, "prohibit those attitudes and activities that violate the relationships of rational agents in pursuit of such common goods."[24] With this move he also seems to soften his earlier, and again, notorious lack of sympathy for 'rights,' belief in which was comparable in his view to "belief in witches and in unicorns,"[25] which was another way of iterating Bentham's equally notorious "nonsense on stilts." But this does not mean that MacIntyre has made a pact with 'natural' rights. Instead, he regards rights as embedded in practices and pursuits of common goods, a view which, he argues, opposes the prevailing modes of rights talk, which continues to configure rights as "continually renewed challenges to what is taken by those who present them to be the institutional status quo, challenges designed to dissolve the bonds, and undermine the authority, of all institutions intermediate between the individual on the one hand and the government and the justice system on the other: such institutions as, families, schools and churches."[26] For MacIntyre rights are not an imprint in an invariant human nature and in this respect his thinking of rights as situated and intelligible in view of the common goods for the pursuit of which they are necessary (enabling) rules is consistent.

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[23] Mark C. Murphy, "MacIntyre's Political Philosophy," in Mark C. Murphy (ed.) *Alasdair MacIntyre* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 167.

[24] MacIntyre, "The Illusion of Self-Sufficiency," in Alex Voorhoeve (ed.) *Conversations on Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 129.

[25] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 69.

[26] MacIntyre, "Community, Law and the Idiom and Rhetoric of Rights",   *Listening:Journal of Religion and Culture* 5, (1991), p 105. For a recent evaluation and comparison of MacIntyre's understanding of 'rights' with certain other approaches see Bill Bowring, "Misunderstanding MacIntyre on Human Rights," *Analyse and Kritik* 30 (2008), pp. 205-14.

But MacIntyre expects natural law to do more than provide only 'enabling rules' in the way of holding in check practices and institutions. Accordingly, he strives to foreground some 'subversive' possibilities of natural law against the centralizing bent of power structures by way of a contextualizing, and quite interesting, reading of Aquinas, who, according to this reading, opposed the "centralizing tendencies in both ecclesiastic and secular affairs" during the theologico-politically volatile decades of the 13th century.[27] Although Aquinas shared some general features of the "*weltanschauung*" of his age, on key questions he represented a dissenting voice in his theologico-political milieu. Contrary to dominant theological trends of his time, Aquinas did not approve repression of vice by legal means (what is today called 'legislation of morality'), notwithstanding his espousal of the role of law in moral education, putting him at odds with puritans as well as liberals. MacIntyre reads into Aquinas's disapproval of legal repression of vice also an attitude against entrusting practical-moral reasoning completely to a professionalized (ecclesiastical as well as secular) elite at the expense of "plain persons," an attitude consonant also with his favorable opinion about the use of canon law, which represented the authority of local customs, together with Roman law, which was obviously a centralizing force. Thirdly, and more to the point about the subversive impact of natural law, Aquinas deployed the resources of natural law to curtail "a systematic set of exclusions" of the time, exclusions visited upon Jews, heretics, and pagans.

How appropriate the word subversive is here is surely open to debate (and I am in principle sympathetic to these kinds of uplifting readings of classical or traditional sources) and the cogency of MacIntyre's interpretation is a matter of Aquinas scholarship, which is already a world unto itself. To mention just one major issue in that scholarship, as we learn from Wolterstorff, interpretations of natural law drawing on Aquinas are divided in terms of whether or not the latter's view of natural law amounts to construing the laws of nature

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[27] MacIntyre, "Natural Law as Subversive: the Case of Aquinas," in *Ethics and Politics: Selected Essays Volume 2* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 41-63.

as an imprint in (human) nature.[28] This issue seems to be pertinent here, because, given MacIntyre's programmatic avoidance of Aristotle's metaphysical biology in favor of a refiguring of Aristotle's thought in terms of social teleology, one wonders how this turn to natural law could be sustained. In other words, how is the natural law approach consistent with his initial statement to the effect of discarding Aristotle's metaphysical biology in favor of social teleology? How can nature and natural law be invoked here "in the absence of a full restoration of Aristotelian or Thomistic metaphysics?"[29] At this point it seems that we are offered a "natural law without nature,"[30] which still does not quite fit with MacIntyre's social teleology.

Before turning to MacIntyre's conception of tradition I would like to stress one point about his treatment of 'rights.' Above I pointed to some moderation in his understanding of rights. This could also be seen in his contention that past practices could involve and sustain rights even if they do not articulate this explicitly, that is, even if they do not have an idiom of rights. As MacIntyre writes, "It does not follow that, where there is no vocabulary to express claims in terms of rights, there can be nothing truly describable as ascribing and claiming rights."[31] But this allowance does not change his principal construal of rights as socially embedded and intelligible insofar as they are nested in practices and common projects geared to common goods. Macintyre anchors rights on practices and this

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[28] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 39.

[29] Fred Dallmayr, *The Other Heidegger* (Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 106. A similar problem arises in relation to MacIntyre's realist understanding of truth, which he thinks bears upon questions of morality and the 'human good' as well as on scientific knowledge. This brings MacIntyre closer to objectivist accounts of the human good. For a critique along this line see Charles Larmore, "Review: Alasdair MacIntyre, Selected Essays" in (http://ndpr.nd.edu/review.cfm?id=10783) *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, 2007.08.17. In this respect, MacIntyre significantly differs from Taylor's hermeneutic-phenomenological moral realism to which we will turn in the next chapter.

[30] Stephen Pope, "Reason and Natural Law", Iian G. Meilaender and W. Werpehowski (eds.) *Oxford Handbook of Theological Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 156.

[31] MacIntyre, "Are There any Natural Rights?" Charles F. Adams Lecture (MN: Bowdoin College, 1983), p. 12; cited in Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*, p. 32.

places his account of rights beyond foundationalist conceptions which attribute rights to human nature, human reason, or spirit.[32]   What is problematic, in my view, is that MacIntyre's way of anchoring rights on practices driven to common projects and goods tends to leave rights at the level of a parochial interest. What will happen, one wonders, to rights in relation to those with whom we do not pursue a common project? MacIntyre's discussion of practices and rights is, I think, in the end closed with a negative balance with respect to rights.

4.6. Tradition against tradition

Gadamer deems proper attention to tradition as a kind of Socratic ignorance, that is, an initial acknowledgment of the need for openness and receptivity to tradition.[33] Thus, acknowledging the role of clusters of foreknowledge and forethought tradition bestows on us is an epistemic and even ontological humility, even though tradition here is not understood as a fixed, steadily unfolding cultural essence. MacIntyre's turn to the concept of tradition seems to acknowledge the same Socratic ignorance, but again in MacIntyre's conception tradition is not something smoothly passed on from one generation to another, a view of tradition he considers and disowns as Burkean. And although his portrayal of tradition at some points in *After Virtue* sounds close to this smooth unfolding of a substantive vision, later on he began to articulate the more agonal aspects of what he calls

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[32] On this question see Fred Dallmayr, "Asian Values and Global Human Rights: Tensions and Convergences," in *Achieving Our World: Toward a Global and Plural Democracy* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), pp. 51-69. I also find Claude Lefort's writings on the topic quite illuminating; see his "Politics and Human Rights," in *Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism* (MIT Press, 1986). Also impressive is Nicholas Wolterstoff's recent work where he distinguishes between 'right order theories of justice' and 'inherent rights theories of justice' and defends the latter in a peculiar and theologically informed way; see his *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton University Press, 2008).

[33] Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason* (Stanford University Press, 1987).

'tradition-guided inquiry.' A key study exemplifying the way he executes such tradition-guided inquiry in the face of 'rival traditions' is his *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry*.[34]

In this book MacIntyre tries to refine his account of virtue ethics as a tradition of inquiry that is in certain crucial respects at odds with two other traditions, what he calls "encyclopedia and genealogy," and ultimately superior to them. Along with this attempt at clarifying the major themes and concerns of his earlier books, he also presents a somewhat detailed discussion of the current situation in academia, especially the interminable disagreements in academic communities. This is why he opens a discussion on 'lecture' as an academic genre and on the modern university as the institutional embodiment of the current academic situation. The central question identified at this point is the problem of incommensurability and untranslatability. This problem is especially striking in the humanities and social sciences, but it is especially thought-provoking for MacIntyre because incommensurability is a challenge also for his own account of the moral situation today and his own orientation in moral and, more generally, philosophical thinking. Endorsing a moral standpoint requires one to respond to the presence of rival and incommensurable standpoints available in the academy and in the larger public discourse.

MacIntyre holds that admission of incommensurability does not by itself render rational debate between rival systems of thought (let's say paradigms) impossible; on the contrary, it may constitute a prologue to rational debate and even to "that kind of debate from which one party can emerge as undoubtedly rationally superior, if only because exposure to such debate may reveal that one of the contending standpoints fails in its own terms and by its own standards," which is in fact the expression of MacIntyre's account of rational vindication. Thus, the only way to transcend incommensurability and to make some progress in rational debate is by evaluating a particular standpoint in its own terms and showing whether or not it is adequate in terms of its own standards. Later on in the

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[34] MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry* (London: Duckworth, 1990).

same book he further clarifies this point by adding that the superiority of any one moral standpoint (A) over another (B) might be vindicated if it is shown that the internal problems and predicaments within B are better explained, articulated, and even resolved by A than can be done by B itself.

MacIntyre identifies three rival paradigms of moral inquiry, which are also rival modes or models of rationality, each finding its canonical expression in a 19th century text - - the encyclopedia as embodied in the Ninth Edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, genealogy as embodied in Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, and the encyclical letter of Pope Leo XIII, *Aeterni Patris*.

Among these rival traditions, the encyclopedic attitude stands out with its unitary conception of substantive rationality and ahistorical rationalism. The unity of truth and reason; synthesis, unilinear progress toward, and convergence on a universal truth; and reliance on the 'scientific treatise' as the proper literary medium of scholarly expression are the fundamental features of this attitude. As a corollary to these, it depends on a strongly drawn distinction between truth-from-a-point-of-view and truth-as-such. When it comes to ethics, all these features of the encyclopedic approach lead to a conception in which moral life is seen in relation to a set of notions like duty, obligation, and rights; a conception providing an ethical standpoint deemed superior to pre-Enlightenment conceptions by rational justification. Although it was a particular standpoint, the encyclopedic vision regarded it as universally valid and applicable to all societies and traditions.

On the other hand, the genealogist subverts all the principal claims of the encyclopedia. According to the former, which is represented by the line of authors from Nietzsche through Foucault to Deleuze and Guattari, all claims to truth are expressions of the will to power disguised under the banner of truth. Truth is in fact not a possibility, and all one can aspire to is a multiplicity of perspectives which discloses the covert dimension of truth talk. Accordingly, genealogy aims at deciphering the relative character of truth and thus adopts 'aphorism' as the principal literary style. In ethics, the genealogical approach

targets the same notions (duty, virtue, obligation, truth) endorsed by the encyclopedist in order to subvert them and uncover the concealed formations of willfulness in them. The genealogist deliberately plays with perspectives, avoids commitment to any one of them, and multiplies perspectives and subject positions in order to lay bare the perspectival character of truth, expose the "false pretensions of reason" and highlight the fictive nature of the self.

Among these two rival and incommensurable perspectives, MacIntyre treats the latter more thoroughly, because he considers the encyclopedist's vision as discredited today even in terms of its own standards (continual progress in rationality, human and social perfection, and resolution of moral issues and disagreements among rational persons). Although higher education and contemporary scholarly practices are still maintained along encyclopedic lines, the encyclopedic approach proved untenable as an account of our moral and, more generally, philosophical condition. However, the genealogist still constitutes a challenge and a genuinely rival standpoint that needs to be engaged. MacIntyre develops an interesting critique of the genealogical view by asking, for instance, who the genealogist is addressing in his or her book. In the encounter between the reader and the writer, there emerges a timeless and atemporal now in which the activity of reading/encountering the text occurs and the ideas of the genealogist are addressed and communicated to an audience. But this must be an atemporal now in which the ideas or arguments of the genealogist must take effect and be intelligible on the basis of standards of reason-giving and reference available to the audience. What MacIntyre tries to indicate with this observation is that a tacit, unacknowledged metaphysics is at work here. MacIntyre admits that the genealogist could respond by saying that even such a tacit metaphysics could be affirmed as a transient position to be later discarded. But, then, in all these transient positions or perspectives the genealogist must still presuppose a continuing self hidden behind and continuing through time beneath all these streams of perspective. As a corollary to this, the genealogist cannot help but depend on a narrative of success and failure to make sense of his or her unmasking odyssey. Also, if the genealogist is addressing anyone, he or

she must presuppose at least the selves of the reader and the writer for such an encounter to be possible in the first place. Thus, the genealogist as author must appeal to certain continuities that hinder his or her principal claims. In the end, the genealogist cannot remain loyal to the requirements of his or her own standpoint and this is one way to show how a moral-philosophical standpoint might fail in terms of its own standards.

According to MacIntyre, despite their differences and incompatibilities, the genealogical and encyclopedic approaches share one point: both consider the history (of philosophy) as continuous. In one case it is a continuous movement from ignorance and superstition toward progress and in the other it is a continuing body of pretensions to universality and objectivity. For MacIntyre, however, there is another possibility, which is to attend to the rupture separating post-Cartesian philosophy from the line of thinkers between Socrates and Aquinas. Such an understanding of the history of philosophy brings us to the third vision of inquiry, which is superior to the others: the tradition-guided rational inquiry exemplified by Thomism.

As indicated above, all three inquiries explored in MacIntyre's book are alternative forms of rationality supplying rival moral standpoints. Whereas the encyclopedist conceives of rationality as impersonal, universal, and disinterested, the genealogist deems it an unwitting representative of particular interests despite false pretensions to neutrality and disinterestedness. Tradition, or the Thomist tradition, on the other hand, holds that reason can achieve true universality and impersonality insofar as it is neither neutral nor disinterested. Here "membership in a particular type of moral community, one from which fundamental dissent has to be excluded, is a condition for genuinely rational enquiry." This means that, although it may sound paradoxical, "a prior commitment is required." Moral and intellectual virtues are needed for initiation into the philosophical community. Hence the requirement of self-knowledge and self-transformation.

'Tradition' considers philosophy as a 'craft' and recognizes a master-apprentice sort of relationship as valid for philosophy, as it is for other crafts. The authority of tradition is

represented by its proficient members. This is a crucial point because, by recourse to such a notion, which MacIntyre worked out in his previous books around the notion of practice, he articulates a number of central dimensions in his (traditional, Thomistic) account: temporality or historical situatedness, authority, tradition-guided or embedded rationality, and membership in a particular moral community.

In his affirmation of the concept of tradition MacIntyre joins other scholars, like Gadamer, who challenge philosophical perspectives that place reason in contrast to tradition. Traditions are the custodians of rationality and rationality figures only within traditions. But, as I noted above, tradition here does not signify the steady unfolding of a substance. On the contrary, MacIntyre identifies at least three moments or situations a tradition might face in its development and in its encounter with other traditions. There are debates and conflicts of interpretation 'within' a single tradition; there are rivalries and disputes 'between' different or rival traditions; and there are sometimes 'epistemological crises' a tradition might undergo as a result of the first two sorts of situation.[35] And when a tradition falls in an epistemological crisis there are two ways to cope with it: conceptual innovation or acknowledging the superiority of another tradition. If, instead of these, a tradition attempts to hide behind epistemic barriers or contrive ways of domesticating challenges, it self-destructs or at least remains stagnant.

Any tradition then needs to meet the challenges of emergent conditions and rival traditions. Depending on its capacity to deal with these conditions, a tradition might progress, fragment, or breakdown. This also means that some of the problems we detected in relation to MacIntyre's conception of practices seem to be addressed at the level of tradition, because rival traditions provide for each other an external standpoint and challenge against which they have to check or even rework themselves. The internal goods of a practice might be challenged by the external viewpoint provided by the moral and

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[35] MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science," in *The Tasks of Philosophy Selected Essays Volume 1* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 3-23.

intellectual resources of another tradition. The renewal of a practice might issue from its engagement with other traditions.

In MacIntyre's conception of tradition there has been a subtle yet important shift which needs to be noted. Although in *After Virtue* tradition was more of a moral characteristic, in later works MacIntyre started to foreground its intellectualist aspects, as can be seen in his focus on 'inquiry,' or traditions of inquiry, and their rational vindication and superiority against one another. Parallel to this subtle shift MacIntyre started to expend a great deal of energy in this vindication endeavor. In elaborating his conception of tradition (or traditions of inquiry) MacIntyre gets his bearings from the history and philosophy of science, especially from figures like Kuhn and Lakatos. His notion of 'traditions of inquiry' sounds rather like Lakatos's 'research programs.' Therefore, as Porter explains, MacIntyre's portrayal of traditions and their relations seems more plausible in the case of scientific traditions than in the moral domain.[36] More crucially, I think, this creates a certain dissonance with our moral situation today, with our multiply situated character. In this regard I find Gadamer's more dialogical conception of tradition and Taylor's attempts, informed by the former's hermeneutics, to retrieve and conceptualize what he calls the Herder-Humboldt line much more promising.[37] The main concern for the latter is not the rational superiority of one tradition over another, but mutually transformative learning processes, which are somewhat subdued in MacIntyre's sweeping concerns with rational validation and the comparative superiority of traditions.

We are multiply situated and we draw implicitly or explicitly upon the intellectual and moral horizons these sites provide for us. Among these horizons we might at times or

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[36] Jean Porter, "Tradition in the Recent Work of Alasdair MacIntyre," Mark C. Murphy (ed.) *Alasdair MacIntyre* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 38-69.

[37] Charles Taylor, "Living with Difference" in A. L. Allen and M. C. Regan (eds.) *Debating Democracy's Discontent* (Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 212-26. A pertinent passage reads as follows: "Since each life can only accomplish some small part of the human potential … we can only benefit from the full range of human achievement and capacity if we live in close association with people who have taken other paths."

in general find some of them more central to our self-understanding or more illuminating for our aspirations. We might even aspire to reach the fullest possible purchase on them to get our bearings and commit ourselves to one. Or, perhaps more modestly, we might strive to achieve what Taylor would call a more clairvoyant state of self-understanding in the face of the various ethical-existential conflicts of modernity. Still, in most cases our situation as embroiled in them does not neatly fit the picture of streamlined traditions vying for our espousal. The merit of MacIntyre's view is that he regards the inability to belong to a tradition on the part of individuals both as a pervasive feature of our contemporary social existence and as bent on conformism to dominant practices and conceptions, and this could be taken as an invitation to a more reflexive attitude to one's attachments.[38] Against the rising tides of conformism and uniformity, attempts at recapturing alternative traditions and world views by engaging in serious inquiry into their intellectual and moral resources are invaluable. But it seems to me that, although MacInytre restores an awareness of finitude in relation to practices, narratives, and traditions, he misses it in its life-worldly density. His interpretations at some points reveal not the picture of a moral self, but the image of an intellectual historian at work.[39]

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[38] MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which rationality?* (Notre Dame University Press, 1988), pp. 394-98.

[39] Others have observed similar limitations in MacIntyre's intellectual historical reconstructions, as well, especially with respect to the Enlightenment. Wokler underlines the exclusion of the French focus despite intensive treatment of the Scottish Enlightenment, which he sees as comparatively peripheral; Gutting points to a humanistic-literary Enlightenment as distinct from philosophical Enlightenment, with which   MacIntyre is heavily preoccupied, with consequent limitations in the latter's depiction of the 'stock characters of modernity.' To these, one can add the somewhat summary treatment Kant sometimes receives. See Robert Wokler, "Projecting the Enlightenment" in J. Horton and S. Mendus (eds.), *After MacIntyre* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), pp. 108-26; Gary Gutting, *Pragmatic Liberalism and the Critique of Modernity* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

4.7. Virtue and Freedom of a *Dependent Rational Animal*

MacIntyre's opus from the beginning emphasized rationality as it is embodied in practices and traditions which are also, as we have already seen, contexts of coherence for the fruition of the virtues. And although we detected a number of puzzles in his turn to Thomistic natural law despite his initial avoidance of Aristotle's metaphysical biology, the general thrust of his thinking did not show any retreat from taking up the question of the virtues in terms of social teleology and the three novel elements he partly implants in, and partly draws out of, Aristotelian ethics and politics: practices, narratives, and tradition. And, also as we noted before, this overall thrust takes on a more intellectualist meta-concern with rational rivalry between and validation of traditions. However, in a comparatively slender recent treatise one may observe a major reorientation in his thinking. Now alongside practices and rationality MacIntyre incorporates two more themes or concerns into his virtue-ethical perspective: human dependency and human animality, which together constitute two definitive aspects of human existence and the solid background to the coming into existence of "independent practical reasoners." Becoming an independent practical reasoner is, in turn, a chief human good; in fact, it is the key course of human flourishing.

Most philosophers, both today and in the past, have taken as the focus of their moral thinking fully adult members of the human species. In a sense, they offer us various forms of an ethics of self-sufficiency, of which rationality has been the master feature. Various forms of human dependency, from infancy to old age, and our primordial (human) animality, and thus certain basic commonalities between human beings and other intelligent animals (dolphins are MacIntyre's principal protagonist here), on the other hand, have not received sufficient attention in this literature. But MacIntyre now argues that any moral theory will be lacking in important respects if it does not take these aspects of human existence into account. But what purpose does it serve to bring human animality and

dependency into relief? Where does it lead us to orientate ethical awareness in the direction of dependency and animality? How are the virtues and freedom served by such an orientation?

MacIntyre ranges over a number of commonalities between humans and higher, or intelligent, animals. One feature common to all biological species is that their telos is flourishing, albeit a flourishing in ways characteristic of the life-form of each species. A second property intelligent animals share with humans is their capacity to have 'reasons for actions' and, even more, to discriminate between varying reasons for action. And a third is the capacity observed in higher animals to participate in cooperative activities and achieve common goods. MacIntyre argues that much contemporary philosophy has lost any view of such commonality or has at least fallen short of making it a special concern due to an excessive separation between humans and non-human animals on the basis of human linguistic abilities. In a sense, MacIntyre is criticizing the linguistic turn of contemporary philosophy on this score. The linguistic orientation in philosophy suppressed non-linguistic forms or aspects of intelligent activity that are quite common among higher animals. It should be noted that here MacIntyre does not deny the importance of differences between "language-possessing and non-language-possessing animals," but evaluates the pervasive "cultural influence of a picture of human nature according to which we are animals and in addition something else" and "we have … first an animal nature, and *in addition* a second distinctively human nature,"[40] as obscuring significant continuities between humans and intelligent non-human animals. Now in this part of the debate MacIntyre engages a fairly intricate range of issues bearing on questions in ethology, biology, and developmental psychology, and one might still wonder what is served by pinpointing the continuity between humans and other higher animals the way MacIntyre does. As far as I can tell, the aim here is to get a purchase on the developmental and biological roots and character of human flourishing, which is partly due of a bodily-biological and developmental character

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[40] MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals* (Open Court, 1999), pp. 49-50.

that is forever open to various sorts of affliction, fragility, and, in general, vulnerability. But this is not the terminus of MacIntyre's account, which comes only after the implications of this generalized vulnerability for human dependency are drawn. In MacIntyre's full account vulnerability and dependency figure as two anthropological constants with which a viable ethico-political perspective must come to grips.

Now, since Macintyre identifies becoming an 'independent practical reasoner' as the chief human good, this good needs to be construed against this background of vulnerability and dependency. This state of human maturity and agency develops against and in the face of many actual or possible afflictions against which, in turn, we need some fundamental, and even continuous, care and responsiveness from others -- first from our families and loved ones but later, as we grow up and become full members of various relational networks of human association, from more collective formations, such as whole communities. The kind of care and responsiveness we need and receive during infancy and in the family (or in parent-child relations) signify the unconditional character of some ethical relations and demands. The nature of parental relations does not rest on reciprocity in giving and receiving and constitutes a prime example of generosity. But this relationship of generosity is directed at some more specific ethical achievements. What we gradually acquire in any such relation of care is the capacity to represent and evaluate the goods at which we aim, to conceive the contours, not of a mere life, but of a good life. At first, we are susceptible to our felt or immediate needs and desires. But we gradually leave this infantile state through the acquisition of a more discriminating evaluative capacity in the face of our needs and desires. We become capable of conceiving and evaluating our 'reasons for action' as good or bad. And, in the end, if the process goes unimpeded by some grave affliction, we become competent or full practical reasoners capable of representing to ourselves not only reasons for action, but wider ranges of goods and concerns. We acquire, following Taylor, "rich human languages of qualitative distinction."

Now, this course of self-development from infant susceptibility to immediacy to competency in practical reasoning is heavily dependent upon the care and generosity we

receive from others. But, crucially, even becoming an independent practical reasoner does not eclipse our fundamental human dependency, but carries it into a more complicated plane. Becoming an independent practical reasoner is not an all-or-nothing matter. It is rather a matter of degrees, because even as competent adult agents we are liable to various inadequacies, frailties, confusions, predicaments, and deficiencies. Against these troubles we need help, criticism, or warning from our friends and others who can shed some light even on what our own good requires, attesting to the fact that no one can be the sole or ultimate authority on one's own good. But even this talk of deficiencies and vulnerabilities does not capture the full import of MacIntyre's notion of dependency here, because there are forms of dependency which are the result of old age, disabilities, or grave suffering, physical or mental, to which any competent human agent is always or perhaps ultimately prone. This means that there are certain sorts of relationships "without which we cannot become independent practical reasoners" or "be sustained as independent practical reasoners." These social relationships provide for us arenas of ethical learning, a form of learning which includes acquisition of a range of virtues, moral and intellectual. Our transition from infantile immediacy (of needs and desires) to a more reflective-evaluative state or, in MacIntyre's words, our "move from dependence on the reasoning powers of others … to independence in our practical reasoning," happens through the transformation and redirection of our desires toward a richer grasp of our own good. MacIntyre's example here is the virtue of temperance, the virtue related to bodily pleasures and needs by which we refrain from our immediate needs and desires, or follow them in a proper degree, in view of a fuller or higher good we seek. So this stage of our self-development as independent practical reasoners involves a cardinal virtue, which is a member of the family of the "virtues of independence." Also, these transformations occur in ordinary human social settings and in ordinary activities, some of which have the characteristics of a practice as discussed above. But this leads us again to the conclusion that there are virtues without which, in turn, these practices and social relationships cannot be maintained in a sound way. The example this time is truthfulness, the possessor of which is accountable,

reliable, and confidential, qualities which are indispensable for the maintenance of an array of practices and shared deliberation and, therefore, common goods.

However, these cardinal virtues required and more or less achieved during our journey to independent agency should not divert our attention away from an even more cardinal virtue in relation to which the whole question of dependency-vulnerability becomes truly intelligible. This is the virtue of generosity. In MacIntyre's account, the world of independent practical reasoners rises on the shoulders of a network of human relations of receiving and giving structured by generosity. In fact, generosity, or, in his new formulation, just generosity, mentioned in a previous chapter, figures as the hinge virtue enlivening human relations and associations. It is *just* generosity because it is conscious of a prior and even continuing dependence on care and regard by others, or of "uncalculated giving" by others; and hence it is a "virtue of acknowledged dependence." It is nourished by a sensitivity to human misfortunes, deformities, and infirmities which may come upon us at any time. Just generosity entails that the kind of receiving and giving going on in these relationships cannot be captured by the usual understanding of justice or generosity alone. As MacIntyre says,

> In order to become independent practical reasoners, we needed from our parents, teachers, and others a kind of care that was not conditional on the expectation that we would render them some service in return. Moreover the people to whom we owe assistance when we have become independent adults may be people who never have done and never will do anything for us. So a certain generosity beyond justice is required if justice is to be done.[41]

What I find especially pertinent for my concerns is MacIntyre's portrayal of the situated and gradual formation of what he calls independence in practical reasoning out of an ensemble of relations of giving and receiving and against a background of actual and potential weaknesses, needs, and vulnerabilities. In this slow process of self-formation, acquisition of the virtues plays a key role in the shaping of such independence in practical

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[41] MacIntyre, "The Illusion of Self-Sufficiency," in Alex Voorhoeve (ed.) *Conversations on Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 125.

reasoning; an independence which is always partial and correlated with other dependencies and vulnerabilities. MacIntyre calls such virtues the virtues of independence. What this suggests is that achieving some measure of independence is always a matter of character formation in accordance with the virtues. In other words, independence is achieved against and in relation to an aretaic background. They are the virtues that guide us to independence. To translate this into my terms, freedom starts to inhabit us and is nourished through our acquisition of the virtues. Freedom is an achievement that rests on ethical self-transformation in an engaged openness to the demands of the world.

Here 'independence' or freedom seems also to be placed beyond the usual alluring dichotomies, like egoism-altruism and autonomy-heteronomy. In regard to the first, MacIntyre is quite explicit. One crucial implication he draws out of his picture of networks of giving and receiving is the irrelevance of a distinction like egoism-altruism. Relations of just generosity explode any such dichotomy because they rest on an understanding according to which the good of each is achievable only in relation to and through the contribution of others. The notion of just generosity as beyond altruism and egoism seems to be informed by Aristotle's conception of friendship, in which, Aristotle says, self-love and other-love are in balance. Though inattentive to human dependency in general, Aristotle's conception of friendship is still rich and relevant in this context, and MacIntyre at one point even stresses the need to extend the hand of generosity to the stranger, which is a novel emphasis in MacIntyre.

Before turning to what sort of politics this perspective leads us to I must note a number of other important changes, some methodological and others more substantive, in MacIntyre's thinking here. The most important change is MacIntyre's turn to human nature as biologically construed, given his earlier indictment of inquiries into ethics focusing on "man qua animal."[42] But this should not be taken as a simple reversal of emphasis from social teleology to metaphysical biology, because both here are in some degree fused.

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[42] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, pp. 150-51.

Human flourishing is construed in terms both of our biological and psychological development and of our participation in social relations, practices and activities. In terms of broader philosophical currents, MacIntyre's attempt to renaturalize ethics by offering an "in some sense … naturalistic account of good" seems to me in line with the search for a non-reductive naturalism in ethics that can be observed among a variety of theorists today.[43] MacIntyre is now in a terrain beyond "natural law without nature." But this time, and despite his statements to the contrary, the role of Thomistic natural law in his account, which is now heavily dependent on current work in disciplines like ethology and biology, seems to be installed as an appendix. Also, MacIntyre's concern with human vulnerability and dependency finds counterparts in approaches ranging from the ethics of care to philosophical perspectives thematizing questions like 'luck' and 'capabilities' in ethics and to philosophies highlighting human finitude and mortality as central guideposts for ethics today – all draw on the ethical implications of human vulnerability and dependency in some form. MacIntyre's interest in these questions brought about some negative revaluations regarding Aristotle's thought. When it comes to vulnerability and dependency, MacIntyre now finds Aristotle's thought terribly defective, as can particularly be seen in the latter's view regarding magnanimity (or greatness of soul), a virtue that, as construed by Aristotle, counteracts any acknowledgment of dependency, vulnerability, or receiving from others.

4.8. Post-statist Politics of Local Community

MacIntyre sees modernity through images of fragmentation and decline. In fact, he could be considered more of a decline theorist than a transformation theorist, if we may

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[43] Some of the most pertinent ones are Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford University Press, 2001); John McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism" in R. Hursthouse et al. (eds.) Virtues and Reasons (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp. 149-78; Sabina Lovibond, *Ethical Formation* (Harvard University Press, 2002).

make such a distinction. And his dramatic portrayals of moral fragmentation recall Adorno's image of the "wrong life" in which ethics figures only as a "melancholy science." MacIntyre's images of the modern "moral wilderness" and moral Babel, together with his depiction of modern ethics as simulacra of morality, are no less dramatic in tone. But, unlike Adorno, who considers staying at the level of *minima moralia* to be the only viable attitude in the midst of a wrong life, MacIntyre initiates the recovery of a Thomistic Aristotelianism, a kind of *magna moralia*, in tension with other moral perspectives. One may still wonder how, after such a colossal fragmentation of ethical life, we could ever find any ground or resource to start again. Likewise, which site could be exempt from such a cataclysm so as to render its inhabitants able to detect its effects, and does this not entail an epistemic privilege there?[44] Today, images akin to that of the 'wrong life' lead some theorists to the denial of any possibility of normative political theory, of any site exempt from such a life.[45] Where does MacIntyre lead us to politically in this Babel, then? MacIntyre's assessment of modern forms of politics extends his ethical strictures to the realm of politics. Modern politics is civil war by other means. It is dominated by elite competition over and through the goods of effectiveness, and therefore it needs to be resisted from the standpoint of the tradition of the virtues. What should immediately be obvious from such a characterization is that MacIntyre construes sound politics in terms of 'practice,' a practice that is, like most others today, under the sway of institutions. More specifically, the very institutions (or the way of institutionalization) of modern politics, particularly the nation-state and its bureaucracy, repress the practice-character of politics and enervates the internal goods of political practice under the sway of money, status, efficiency, and power. So, given the concrete communal character of practices, does

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[44] For a criticism along these lines see Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton University Press, 2004).

[45] See Giuseppe Taasone, "Antinomies of Transcritique and Virtue Ethics: An Adornian Critique," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* v.34 n.6 (2008), pp. 665-84. Hardt and Negri in their *Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2000) consider normative political theory as an anachronistic enterprise today when politics is a field of pure immanence and immediately given with no outside to check it.

MacIntyre's position reveal a communitarian standpoint? This is the usual label attributed to him, along with a host of other political thinkers today, and, given that *After Virtue*'s conclusion was a plea for the coming of a new St. Benedict, the father of monastic life, to guide us in our dark age, his views may rightly be considered a form of communitarian politics. But, on the other hand, he has at every opportunity opposed such a characterization of his standpoint and offered reasons for this denial. First of all, he admits that communities are always open to corruption; and, therefore, secondly, community *per se* is not the normative ideal he espouses; thirdly, for MacIntyre communitarianism represents the mistake of infusing "the politics of the state with the values and modes of participation in local community." But this means that he affirms modes of local community to the extent that they shed or are free of statist qualities. This is why I think MacIntyre's political theory may be described as a 'sophisticated communitarianism'[46] or a post-statist politics of local community. According to MacIntyre, the level at which politics can be maintained as a practice is the level of the local community. Despite the fact that it provides the most solid and initial bond of generosity, the family is naturally limited in providing an arena and instilling certain capacities required for the formation of a broader perspective for the evaluation of our good as social beings. But the state, on the other hand, is a leviathan cursed by its own massive body to exhaust genuine political practice. Despairing deeply of the state's political agency, MacIntyre emphasizes that the small is beautiful even in politics. Certainly no one today can see state as the bearer of rationality. The state at present is disenchanted. But celebrating local communities against the state amounts to something like dissolving Hegelian holism and mediation into one of its constitutive moments, which would not be to the benefit of any one of them. Some socio-economic and political concerns can only be dealt with at a supra-communal level; and, just like MacIntyre's traditions, communities would arguably flourish more in an environment of openness to challenges and questioning which would render the cultivation of potentialities and

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[46] I borrow this term from N. Smith and A. Laitinen who ascribe it to Taylor, but it is I think more appropriate in the case of MacIntyre. See Nicholas H. Smith and Arto Laitinen, "Taylor on Solidarity", *Thesis Eleven*, Number 99, November (2009), pp. 48–70.

reciprocal disclosure possible. Also, in our global moment, any retreat back to communities would probably be a futile undertaking. What we need is perhaps to preserve mediations between levels below and above the state. In this respect, MacIntyre's recent overtures to the stranger seem promising indeed.

CHAPTER 5

RETRIEVING THE GOOD WITH TAYLOR

Retrieving goodness for our late modern times constitutes a prime challenge confronting political thinking today. The reference to late modernity here is not a haphazard one. Characterized by profound ruptures and transformations, ours is a time of endings and beginnings, arrivals and departures, usually represented in the self-images of the age by the notorious prefix -*post*: postmodernism, post-humanism, postindustrial, etc. Not only in terms of political upheavals and turbulence, but also in terms of intellectual currents and tendencies, our times invite, and maybe necessitate, works of retrieval in various domains of life: retrieving solidarity after fragmentation, equity and justice after exploitation, recognition after denial, authenticity after alienation, fullness after disenchantment, and "retrieval of the good after normativity."[1]

The idea of the good has always been one of the seminal ideas in the history of ethics and politics. In Plato the idea of the good, or *agathon*, constitutes the hinge point of a great metaphysical edifice. The idea of the good is at the summit of the hierarchy of ideas, it is the highest idea, and it is "the source not only of the intelligibility of what can be understood, but also of its being and essence" (*Republic*, 509B 6-8). Aristotle pushes this idea toward a more teleological rendition. He famously opens his *Nicomachean Ethics* with

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[1] Richard Kearney, "Epiphanies of the Everyday: Toward a Micro-Eschatology," in J. P. Manoussakis (ed.) *After God: Richard Kearney and the Religious Turn in Continental Philosophy* (Fordham University Press, 2006), p. 8.

the postulation that "every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim."

Putting the question this way, however -- that is, approaching the issue from the notorious distinction between the Platonic and the Aristotelian conceptions of the good -- might readily lead us into deeper metaphysical quandaries concerning the idea of the good. Although it has for some time now been commonplace to pit Aristotle against Plato in this domain, the very idea itself has usually seemed somewhat elusive in terms of its epistemological and ethico-political implications. Pointing out how futile and far it would be from "the path of authentic questioning" to try to get a "propositional explanation" of this idea, Heidegger contends,

> One straightaway wants to know what the good is, just like one wants to know the shortest route to the market place. … This does not mean, however, that the idea of the good is a 'mystery,' i.e. something one arrives at only through hidden techniques and practices, perhaps through some kind of enigmatic faculty of intuition, a sixth sense or something of the kind.[2]

The precise character of the idea of the good has been highly contentious among philosophers, making its implications for ethics and politics likewise controversial. For some, again like Heidegger, the idea had no bearing at all for ethics[3]; whereas, somewhat parting from his mentor, Gadamer devoted some of his most interesting studies to the clarification, or even the rescue, of the ethico-political, or more generally the practical, import of the same idea.

Now all of this talk of the good might sound excessively metaphysical for our late modern ears. We are, in fact, very distant from a Platonic understanding of the good. Yet, even in our times there have started to emerge qualified witnesses, from Iris Murdoch to

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[2] Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, trans. Ted Sadler (Continuum Books, 2002[1988]), p. 70.

[3] Heidegger says, "It does not have any kind of *moral* meaning: ethics has corrupted the fundamental meaning of this word"; *The Essence of Truth*, p. 77.

Levinas, to the powerful pull of the good in our ethical life, despite its metaphysical echoes. Still, they all know how difficult it is to give the idea of the good some of its past grandeur given the philosophical *Zeitgeist*, and how arduous a task it is to initiate some work of retrieval in this domain. In characterizing post-Kantian moral philosophy, Murdoch states, "The idea of the good remains indefinable and empty so that human choice may fill it. The sovereign moral concept is freedom."[4]

Among contemporary attempts at retrieving the idea of the good or the good life, Charles Taylor's oeuvre stands out as a prolific initiative. In a number of places, Taylor offers his own interpretation of the fall of the Platonic way of thinking about the good. Although the overall structure of the model maintained its dominance throughout the ancient period, it underwent some major transformations under recurring reappraisals from Aristotle through the Hellenistic thinkers to Descartes, where the model ultimately undergoes what Taylor calls an "internalization" process. The model of Platonic self-mastery is maintained, but its cosmic moorings are broken; and the whole idea of mastering the self and achieving the right ordering of the soul is interiorized.[5] Here it should be noted that Taylor in general wants to preserve some of the insights of this Platonic model, especially its transcendentalist bent, to which we shall later return. More important for our purposes, however, is his explication of the good in relation to the self.

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[4] Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of the Good* (Routledge Classics, 2001 [1970]), p. 78. Pertinent also is Murdoch's remark that "mystics of all kinds ... have attempted by extremities of language to portray the nakedness and aloneness of Good, its absolute for-nothingness. One might say that true morality is a sort of unesoteric mysticism, having its source in an austere and unconsoled love of the Good" (p. 90).

[5] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 124.

5.1. Phenomenological Ways to the Good

Most of Taylor's work devoted to the place of the good in our moral and political life and its relation to our sense of selfhood is of a phenomenological, or, more properly, a hermeneutic phenomenological character. What he offers is, as he says, a "phenomenological account of identity."[6] The promise of moral phenomenology is to grasp the human being as a moral agent in its concrete wholeness. This is why most thinkers who aimed at transcending the characteristically Kantian focus on the determination of the pure rationality of moral maxims or the utilitarian appeal to uncovering the utility function of moral acts make recourse to phenomenology in order to capture human moral being in its entirety and as it is given to experience. Despite his ultimate concern with and stress on discursive validation and communicative instantiation of moral insights, even Habermas concedes that our primary access to the moral domain can only be thematized via a phenomenology of morals, that is, with a focus on our ordinary life praxis and our experiential life-worldly encounters. He writes, "As long as moral philosophy concerns itself with clarifying the everyday intuitions into which we are socialized, it must be able to adopt, at least virtually, the attitude of someone who participates in the communicative practice of everyday life."[7] To this extent, "the moral philosopher must take up a vantage point from which he can perceive moral phenomena *as* moral phenomena" and "in a performative attitude."[8] But Habermas's interest in the phenomenology of morals is of a transitory bent, something like an intermediary moment in order to move toward more justificatory levels of moral thinking. In congruence with this deeper motive he takes his

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[6] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 32.

[7] Jurgen Habermas, "Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification", in his *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. C. Lenhardt and S. W. Nicholson (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), p. 48.

[8] Habermas, "Discourse Ethics", p. 47.

bearings from what he calls a "*linguistic* phenomenology of ethical consciousness"[9] as it is elaborated by Strawson, primarily in his article "Freedom and Resentment." His initial acknowledgment of the role of moral phenomenology as our primary means of access to the moral realm then lends itself to a stronger and broader concern for distilling the "moral core"[10] of ordinary moral experiences along formal pragmatic lines. Habermas's reconstructive energy is, therefore, poured more into the discursive validity of norms of action rather than disclosure of morals in the first place.

However, notwithstanding the above characterization of his project as sort of a *linguistic* variant of phenomenology, Strawson's work is emphatic on the role of moral feelings, emotions, and intuitions as they arise in our daily encounters, especially the feelings of resentment, gratitude, and forgiveness. In trying to make clear "what it is actually like to be involved in ordinary interpersonal relationships," Strawson stresses the importance of "the mere manifestation of attitude and intention" as the source of "gratitude, resentment, forgiveness, love, and hurt feelings." As he states,

> How much we actually mind, how much it matters to us, whether the actions of other people—and particularly of *some* other people—reflect attitudes towards us of goodwill, affection, or esteem on the one hand or contempt, indifference, or malevolence on the other. If someone treads on my hand accidentally, while trying to help me, the pain may be no less acute than if he treads on it in contemptuous disregard of my existence or with a malevolent wish to injure me. But I shall generally feel in the second case a kind and degree of resentment that I shall not feel in the first. If someone's actions help me to some benefit I desire, then I am benefited in any case; but if he intended them so to benefit me because of his general goodwill towards me, I shall reasonably feel a gratitude which I should not feel at all if the benefit was an incidental consequence, unintended or even regretted by him, of some plan of action with a different aim.[11]

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[9] Habermas, "Discourse Ethics", p. 45. Emphasis is mine.

[10] Habermas, "Discourse Ethics", p. 48.

[11] P. F. Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* (Taylor & Francis, 2008), p.5.

5.2. The Way through Emotions in Moral Phenomenology

What is emphasized in general here is the way in which these emotions color our engaged experiences of morals, and how they inflect interpersonal relations and the moral flow of life. In one of the earliest works devoted specifically to moral phenomenology, Mandelbaum raises similar concerns regarding the emotional import of interpersonal situations. Although Mandelbaum is ultimately concerned with moral consciousness as it is expressed "chiefly in moral judgments", his starting point also seems to be the emotionally saturated character of moral encounter and experience. He says, "I sense the embarrassment of a person, and then turn the conversation; I see a child in danger and catch hold of its hand; I hear a crash and become alert to help."[12]

All these observations attest to the significance of intuitions and feelings in morals. This is astonishing in itself given the inferior or at best secondary status ascribed to emotions and feelings in most traditional moralities. Feelings, emotions, and above all passions were usually held to be the dark realm of man that morality, powered by the light of reason, was to dispel. According to Solomon, "This is the mistake of so many traditional theories: they take emotions at their worst and most irrational and reason at its best, usually as corrective to emotions."[13] But beyond moral theories, even our ordinary way of talking about emotions usually seems subject to the imagery of a "hydraulic metaphor" that portrays emotions as "fluid forces, pushing their way up through the psyche, accumulating, and eventually bursting through."[14] These observations help Solomon to identify more

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[12] M. Mandelbaum, *The Phenomenology of Moral Experience* (The Free Press, 1955), p. 48; cited in H. I. Dreyfus and S. E. Dreyfus, "What is Morality? A Phenomenological Account of the Development of Ethical Expertise," in David Rasmussen (ed.), *Universalism vs. Communitarianism: Contemporary Debates in Ethics* (MIT Press, 1990), pp. 237-264.

[13] Robert C. Solomon, *A Passion for Justice: Emotions and the Origins of the Social Contract* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995), p. 44.

[14] Solomon, *A Passion for Justice*, p. 223.

specifically why feelings and emotions are treated with such disdain in many traditional moral theories, despite some more sympathetic reception in modern times, as in the so-called 'moral sense school,' represented initially by Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, and further elaborated by Hume and Adam Smith into a general theory of 'moral sentiments.' With reference to Kant, who is held accountable for the greatest harm perpetrated against the role of emotions in ethics, Solomon detects eight allegations against emotions. Emotions are ineffable, too personal, not amenable to judgment, subjective, irrational, and capricious, concern only the particular as opposed to the universal, and, lastly, are not amenable to command.[15] When it comes to ethics, then, emotions are not regarded as relevant. But is this a sound conclusion?[16] The whole enterprise of phenomenology, especially its offshoots

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[15] Solomon, *A Passion for Justice*, pp. 211-216.

[16] Solomon's response to this is understandably negative. Against the eight Kantian theses on emotions mentioned above, Solomon either deploys counter-arguments or tries to dispel the underlying rationale of the relevant theses. To paraphrase, against the ineffability thesis, he retorts that our normative language has been so deeply molded by the philosophical tradition on a rationalist model that ethics can now be seen as an almost emotionally sterile field, at least on some accounts. Emotions are largely left to poets for clarification, and, therefore, ineffability is in fact due to the inadequacy of the philosophical tradition. Against the charge "too personal"; similarly, this stems from the objectivist bent and detached posture of much philosophical ethics, which is still under the pressure of scientism. Can't we make judgments about emotions, as the third thesis contends? Why not? We often evaluate and make judgments about emotions in terms of whether they are reasonable, justifiable, or appropriate given a certain situation or not. Emotions are open to debate, clarification, improvement, reassessment, and evaluative judgment. But aren't they subjective (the fourth thesis)? Surely they are, but why is that a problem? Subjectivity entails an irreducible relation to a certain object, but this does not prevent the subject from following and evaluating an argument. To the extent that we take subjectivity or our irreducibly subjective relation to emotions as the beginning and not the end of an argument about justice, there is no problem. Objectivity depends on an a priori subjectivity. A broader subjective orientation is required even for objectivity to take hold. Are they irrational (the fifth thesis)? "Some are. Most are not." It is not an intrinsic quality of all emotions; it often depends on the context and the relevant motives/reasons. What about the caprice of emotions (the sixth one)? In this favorite argument of Kant, he ignores and does not really consider Hume's thesis about the natural and universal character of certain sentiments like sympathy. Moreover, reason itself assumes varying manifestations among cultures and times. Concerning only the particular, not the universal (the seventh)? This is another prevailing obsession from some of the earliest to an awful number of the latest positions in the tradition. Plainly, when the personal and the particular constitute some sort of priority in a given situation, yielding to universal principles is the greatest injustice. And, lastly, against the 'no command thesis', Solomon argues that maybe we cannot, strictly speaking, 'command' emotions, but we hold people responsible for their emotions, we criticize, reflect

toward ethics, comprises various sophisticated attempts at vindicating not only the relevance but also the centrality of emotions. But how can emotions be rescued from such colossal attacks and why would such a rescue operation be significant?

In moral phenomenology emotions are seen as more or less reliable guides to the moral domain. Much depends, however, on the way one treats emotions in relation to our being-ethical, whether it be with an existential phenomenological or ontological approach or more of a merely descriptive (phenomenological) elucidation of moral feelings. Plainly put, in keeping with its founding motto, "to the things themselves," phenomenology deems appearances important. This is because, although one might err in one's perception or conception of something, one is most sure about its appearance to oneself, to one's consciousness. But the stress on consciousness here still keeps us in the grip of only a particular manner in which the phenomenology of morals is pursued. It remains within the realm of cognition, of a cognitivist account of moral experience. Now, the way values, or, in Kriegel's words, "axiological objects," appear to oneself is primarily through emotions and affects.[17] This was the way, for instance, Max Scheler established his point of departure for moral phenomenology and his peculiar 'ethics of value.' Emotional experiences convey value-feelings to us. They are felt valuations and "values and valuables appear to us most faithfully and lucidly in emotional experience."[18] This insight was partly due to Scheler's relatively free style of phenomenology, which prioritizes core intuitions over methodological scruples.[19] Emotions, in this regard, are not, in Scheler's words, "blind

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on, and cultivate emotions. Solomon's overall argument is ultimately that emotions are the basis of our more elaborate moral notions, including, and especially our sense of justice.

[17] Uriah Kriegel, "Moral Phenomenology: Foundational Issues," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, Volume 7, Number 1 / March, 2008, p. 3.

[18] Kriegel, "Moral Phenomenology," p. 3.

[19] Manfred S. Frings, "Scheler", in Simon Critchley and William R. Schroeder (eds.), *A Companion to Continental Philosophy* (Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 208-215. In Frings's words, for Scheler "phenomenology must not primarily be methodological but should be based on core intuitions upon which a method can only be applied."

feelings,"[20] but are the very texture of our world-awareness. Scheler's philosophical approach points to a different manner in which moral phenomenology can be pursued. This whole style of thinking opens a path in which it becomes quite conceivable to see affects and affectivity as a sort of proto-ethics.[21]

5.3. Taylor's Moral Phenomenology

Taylor's moral phenomenology gets its bearings from similar considerations. Feelings are not just "brute sensations," but are rather "affectively charged perceptions of the natural world that surrounds us."[22] More specifically, though, what is the nature of our emotional experiences? Can emotional experiences be made subject to an objective analysis? If not, can they be categorized with what are called secondary qualities, for instance? Can we understand them as only an aspect of our human sensibility and, therefore, not part of the makeup of the universe?

Now, for some of our immediate feelings a quasi-objectivist account might seem quite plausible -- physical pain or physical fear, for instance. A physiological or objective analysis of pain or fear might capture a great deal of what is involved in these immediate feelings, although even in such cases "the kind and mode of feeling them is by no means

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[20] Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values: A New Attempt Toward the Foundation of an Ethical Personalism* (Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 255. The context where Scheler uses this phrase is when he tries to reinterpret Pascal's famous "Le coeur a ses raisons" (the heart has its reasons) as an instance of how emotion, together with reason, is construed as part of a fuller ethics. He develops this idea toward a distinction between 'intentional feelings' and 'feeling-states.'

[21] For an interpretation of affectivity as proto-ethics see also John Caputo's "A Phenomenology of Moral Sensibility: Moral Emotion," in George F. McLean (ed.), *Personalist Ethics and Human Subjectivity* (CRVP, 1996), pp. 49-69.

[22] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Belknap Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 712.

yet determined." There are changing facts involved when I 'suffer,' 'endure,' 'tolerate,' or even 'enjoy' 'pain.'[23] An objective account of physical pain or fear could be attempted, though at the risk of a reductive analysis. Taylor gives as an example the relative adequacy of medical language to describe our situation "when we are physically afraid" in cases in which we feel "menace to life and limb" -- when, for instance, "a tiger is prowling in the garden, or a hostile mob seems about to attack." Such cases seem amenable to description in objective terms. What is feared could be described as "injury which will cause severe pain, or malfunction of our limbs or organs, or death."[24] We can even imagine a machine with receptors identifying relevant causal factors as dangerous and registering them as inputs so as to recognize the fearsome situation, because the reconstruction of the fearsome state in (medically) objective terms, as in the above example, presumes a causal and probabilistic process in menacing situations, and thus allows a mechanistic analogy, comprising "a complete structural analogue of fear".[25]

But most of our characteristically human emotions would make such accounts seem terribly facile and simplistic. Anxiety, especially "unfocussed anxiety," when there is, strictly speaking, no explicit or objective causal determination, or shame, when the shameful cannot be indexed, again, to strictly causal properties, would defy objective accounts of the kind mentioned above. Taylor pays particular attention to the feeling of shame, when, in Nietzsche's words, "the feeling 'I am the mid-point of the world!' arises very strongly … dazzled as though by a great eye which gazes upon us and through us from all sides."[26] That in certain cases what arouses this feeling might be identified as an 'object

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[23] Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, p. 256.

[24] Charles Taylor, "Self-Interpreting Animals", in *Human Agency and Language (Philosophical Papers I)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.51.

[25] Taylor, "Self-Interpreting Animals," p. 52. But even in these cases, notes Taylor, "the actual feeling of fear, and indeed the sense of self-awareness itself" are lacking.

[26] Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 166; cited in Merold Westphal, "Shame as a Political Virtue," in Terence Cueno (ed.), *Religion in the Liberal Polity* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), p. 240.

of shame,' such as a "shrill voice" or "effeminate hands," may mislead us into falling back on naïve objectivism again. But on closer inspection it becomes clear that these properties can only be objects of shame in a context in which they are expressive of certain meanings and where their relevant implications embody particular significances. A shrill voice and effeminate hands, for instance, might be thought to indicate a lack of manliness, strength, and self-possession, and thus be taken as contrary to all that could be considered as part of human dignity in a given cultural horizon.[27] This is why shame is also associated with what is called 'double intentionality,'[28] meaning that our feeling of shame is not just an (intentional) act on our part, but it is also a feeling in the face of others, as the intentional locus of others. Shame is usually shame in our being with others or, in Taylor's words, in our being "a presence among others."[29] Consequently, the character of our emotional experiences involves more than what an objectivist account can offer. There is a surplus that cannot be neatly captured by objective terms. The being of the shameful requires more than a causal nexus; it requires an agent capable of experiencing a certain range of feelings, such as shame, and experiencing them as correlates of some further or deeper meanings, such as dignity, honor, or autonomy. The contrast with the fearsome or the menacing situation is clear. In the menacing situation, the whole condition might be described in terms of the probability of an attack and of grievous physical harm arising from that attack. The physical harm can, in turn, be described in medical or physiological terms. But in the shameful situation a deeper level is opened up, a level which can only be comprehended in terms of characteristically human meanings. Without these meanings, without a whole network of human significances, the shameful in most cases cannot make sense. Thus,

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[27] Taylor, "Self-Interpreting Animals", p. 53.

[28] John Wild, *Existence and the World of Freedom* (Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 182. Similarly, Béatrice Han-Pile underlines the implications of shame for existential phenomenological analysis of inter-subjectivity with reference to Sartre. See her "Affectivity" in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (eds.) *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 250, n. 22. Sartre deals with shame in his famous chapter on "The Look" in the third part of *Being and Nothingness*.

[29] Taylor, "Self-Interpreting Animals", p. 53.

emotional experiences require a form of life embodying these meanings in human interaction, practices, and even human institutions.

But maybe we are being too hasty. Before approaching the threshold of an account with reference to a form of life, we need to further clarify emotional experiences to see their peculiarly human significance more clearly. In order to unpack these unique aspects Taylor refers to what he calls the 'imports' that situations bear and emotions bestow on us. So far we have established that what emotions register are not, strictly speaking, causes. Emotional experiences are not reducible to stimulus-response processes. They are not merely responsive to causality. But they are nevertheless entwined around situations. They betray what is involved in situations and they originate as correlates of situations. In a sense they register the sense of the situation. For Taylor, an import is what an emotional experience discloses to us in relation to a situation. In the case of anxiety, for instance, where there is no object or focus openly corresponding to the feeling, this very "inability to find a focus is itself an aspect of my sense of my situation." Even though the locus of my feeling is not open to a straightforward characterization, it is still not "objectless *simpliciter*"; it rather incorporates my sense of my situation, such as the sense of an impending threat. So, if we follow the example, when I am in the grip of anxiety, the import of my situation is the sense of an impending threat. But this emotion-import-situation pattern can be observed in most of our characteristically human emotions, which are experienced as involving a certain property, such as being humiliating, shameful, ominous, exhilarating, prideful, or blissful.[30]

In all these delicate descriptions regarding a variety of human emotions and feelings, the chief task is to elucidate the experiential character of human emotions. All these feelings and their imports, according to Taylor, are subject-referring. That is, they entail a subject of emotions, as we emphasized above. This is why in a further clarification of the term import Taylor speaks of it as "a way in which something can be relevant or of

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[30] Taylor, "Self-Interpreting Animals", p. 48.

importance to the desires or purposes or aspirations or feelings of a subject."[31] However, they are at the same time experience-dependent. They cannot be isolated into, or reduced to, categorical units such as subject and object, or cause and effect, but they are correlates of a complex relational pattern, a network of meanings. The relation is one of relevance or significance, not causality. Imports are thus inside and outside; they are both in *our* experience, but at the same time out in the event of the experience. Of course, experiences are concrete; concrete human beings experience concrete situations as imbued with emotionally-charged meanings, or, imports. But the concrete here should be taken in the existential sense of the term.

What ultimately emerges here is, in Solomon's words, "a unitary phenomenon" that is not reducible to an emotion-object bifurcation. This emphasis is important because it also challenges attempts to understand emotions in intentional terms. Emotions are not just experiences of *emotionally* intending objects. There is no one-way street here. "An emotion defines its object, just as the object defines the emotion."[32] Hence, again, neither mere intentionality nor mere causality will quite capture the depth of emotional experiences.

5.4. Heideggerian Background

By this point it should have become apparent that Taylor is not just dealing with phenomenological elucidation, but also striving to uncover some of the deeper, ontological vectors of human being as they emerge in characteristically human situations of affect.

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[31] Taylor, "Self-Interpreting Animals", p. 48.

[32] Robert C. Solomon, "Emotions in Phenomenology and Existentialism," in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (eds.) *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 301-302. A similar nuance could be discerned in above remarks about shame as an emotional experience, although in that case the language is still in the grip of 'intentionality', e.g. 'double intentionality.'

Here the Heideggerian background to this strategy of approaching depth phenomenologically is fairly clear. Indeed, Heideggerian mood analysis constitutes the paradigm here. The phenomenological investigation of moods occupies a decisive place in Heidegger's existential analytic of *Dasein*, in revealing the "existential constitution of the there," and in uncovering the 'facticity' of everyday *Dasein*. The word Heidegger originally uses in his analysis of moods is *Befindlichkeit*. Sometimes this is translated as 'state-of-mind' or disposition, but most commentators, and the translators themselves, point to the inadequacy, or even the possibly distorting effects, of this phrase, suggesting instead that the German term means "more literally, the state in which one may be found."[33] Neither a mental, nor a psychological connotation is, however, primarily intended here. The phenomenon of moods is scrutinized, in Heidegger's words, "as a fundamental *existentiale,*" and what are thematized are, thus, fundamental ontological structures as they are disclosed in our moods. Our ordinary states of affect are important for the implicit ontology they reveal. More terminologically, our ontic affective experiences are important for their ontological overtones. So much so that, according to Heidegger, "the possibilities

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[33] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Blackwell, 1962), p. 172, n. 2. As the translators note the word is Heidegger's own coinage from the colloquial German expression "*Wie befinden Sie sich?*",literally meaning, "How are you?" or "How are you feeling?" Hubert L. Dreyfus also mentions 'situatedness' and 'where-you're-at-ness' as possible candidates, but he ultimately finds them all wanting in some respect. He finally settles for 'affectedness' as the best of all available candidates. Dreyfus also notes how broad and varied are the uses to which Heidegger's approach can put the word 'mood,' or *Stimmung* in German: "*sensibility* of an age (such as romantic), the *culture* of a company (such as aggressive), the *temper* of the times (such as revolutionary), as well as the *mood* in a current situation (such as the eager mood in the classroom) and, of course, the mood of an individual." See his *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I* (MIT Press, 1991), p. 168-169. Others note a shift from an ahistorical conception of moods to a historical one in later Heidegger, who asserts that *wonder*, in contrast to the ancients, is no longer possible as a mood for us moderns. See the pieces by Béatrice Han-Pile and Robert C. Solomon in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (eds.) *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

of disclosure which belong to *cognition* reach far too short a way compared with the primordial disclosure belonging to moods."[34]

But what is disclosed in moods? The first is the very fact that we are always in some mood. Even in our seemingly most indifferent or apathetic states, we are likely in the grip of one mood or another, possibly boredom or anxiety. Even in our most detached stances toward the world, such as in the scientific investigation of nature or some phenomena, we are in a scientific, that is, exploratory, inquisitive, or curious mood.[35] And oftentimes our constantly "moodwise" condition is best betrayed while we are struggling to flee a certain mood. A good mood can deteriorate into a bad one, and while a certain mood discloses the burdensome character of Being, another mood, "a mood of elation," might dissipate this burdensome character. But by this very act of dissipation, it once again indicates the burdensome character of Being as an (affective) possibility; it reinstates its other. But then again, what is disclosed thereby? The fact that we are always "mooded" [36] and "never free of moods"[37] discloses the 'thrown' character of our existence or, simply, our "thrownness." This is because in a mood "Dasein is always brought before itself, and has always found itself … in the sense of finding itself in the mood that it has," and "as an entity which has been delivered over to its Being."[38] That we find ourselves in moods, or that, somewhat paradoxically, we are given to ourselves in moods, signifies our always already thrown existence.

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[34] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 173. Emphasis is mine. Heidegger also asserts that since Aristotle there had been no advance worth mentioning in the ontological interpretation of moods up until phenomenology assumed the task. See p. 178.

[35] "But," says Heidegger, "pointing this out is not to be confused with attempting to surrender science ontically to 'feeling.'" *Being and Time*, p. 177.

[36] Caputo, "A Phenomenology of Moral Sensibility," p. 54.

[37] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 175.

[38] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 174.

Affectivity or moods are disclosive also in that they reveal the world in such a way that entities in or aspects of it matter to us in certain ways. What matters to us, does so due to our moods. In other words, affectivity is the way in which things, situations, and people matter to us. As Heidegger says, "A mood assails us."[39] And in varying situations and contexts varying moods assail us. In the wilderness in the dark, for instance, any strange voice or occurrence, anything blocking our way or vision, might seem – and might make our environment seem – uncanny, worrisome, or disturbing. But when we are in the laboratory, things will not matter to us this way. Voices, sights, or obstacles will not strike us as threatening, at least not in the above sense. Presumably we will not be absorbed by feelings of the uncanny. But then we will be immersed in a different mood, in the mood of scientific curiosity, perhaps, seeking objective explanations of obstacles in our way. Moods assail and predispose us toward the world even in the absence of any specifiable object. Things can affect us this way or that only because we are already immersed in a certain mood. This is to say that moods disclose various ways in which things can matter to us. Mattering is "grounded in one's state-of-mind; and as a state-of-mind it has already disclosed the world – as something by which it can be threatened, for instance. Only something which is in the state-of-mind of fearing (or fearlessness) can discover that what is environmentally ready-to-hand is threatening."[40] Moods are states in which we find ourselves in a range of concerns, where things matter to us in varying ways. They unveil a whole context of significance within which we find ourselves already concerned with a variety of matters, practical or personal. And some moods are especially ontologically revealing, such as anxiety, melancholy, despair. This is why these moods in particular have attracted so much attention in the existentialist and phenomenological literature.

Now this whole analysis of moods by Heidegger guides us toward an understanding of the always already exposed character of our being, or *Dasein*'s primordial openness to

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[39] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 176.

[40] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 176.

the world. Moods signify our affective openness and exposure to the world. This is why Heidegger describes moods as our "disclosive submission to the world."[41] This insight, having its roots in the phenomenological notion of intentionality, now denotes a more radical, ontological characteristic of human being. Heidegger, in contrast to Husserl, seeks to distill the pre-reflective or pre-cognitive overtones of moods, rather than seeing them as intentional. Husserlian intentionality was certainly fruitful in the way of revealing the engaged character of *Dasein*, or the primordial connection of man and world; yet Husserl's construal of emotions as intentional acts toward values was still some distance from covering the pre-reflective, non-intentional depth of moods, which Heidegger embraced as central in his explorations.[42] But the same difference can also be seen as a broadening or deepening of intentionality. If, following Schrag, we take the major thrust of Heidegger's analysis as an attempt at uncovering our "pre-cognitive relatedness to a world of existential concerns," then what we have is an "existentialized and historicized" intentionality.[43] On the other hand, one should not fail to notice that Heidegger's emphasis on *Dasein*'s world-openness is not a pretext to dissolve man in moods. On the contrary, he affirms that volition and cognition might, and maybe should, have the upper hand "in certain possible ways of existing," and that "Dasein can, should, and must, through knowledge and will, become master of its moods." But this is no denial of the ontological primordiality of moods, "in which Dasein is disclosed to itself *prior to* all cognition or volition, and *beyond* their range of disclosure."[44]

This Heideggerian background provides the main impetus behind the accent on the inadequacy of understanding emotional experiences in terms of the subject-object

[41] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 177.

[42] Steven Galt Crowell, "Heidegger and Husserl: the Matter and Method of Philosophy," in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (ed.) *A Companion to Heidegger* (Blackwell, 2005), pp. 49-64.

[43] Calvin O. Schrag, *Existence and Freedom: Towards an Ontology of Human Finitude* (Northwestern University Press, 1961), pp. 20-25.

[44] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 175.

dichotomy. In fact, Heidegger emphasizes this point a number of times in his analysis of moods. Falling into the grip of a certain mood is not like "coming across a physical condition." But neither is it "related to the psychical in the first instance." It is "not itself an inner condition which then reaches forth in an enigmatical way and puts its mark on things and persons." "It comes neither from outside, nor from inside." Or, to use Heidegger's particular terminology, the facticity disclosed through moods is not to be confused with the factuality of things present-at-hand. In moods what is distinctive is not the perception of anything, not even perception of ourselves, but that we are brought before ourselves, we already find ourselves. We are already engrossed in a field of concerns. All these make subjectivist as well as objectivist points of departure deficient in the analysis of moods. In Hatab's felicitous phrases, moods are modes of "emergent ambience," or of "ambient attunement," rendering conscious, subjective control, or objectivist detachment impotent.[45] Hence, returning to the above question as to why we should attempt to rescue emotions from philosophical oblivion or condescension, we may answer that our emotions, affectivity, or moods are part of our world-engagement and they help reveal our primordial insertion into a life-world. They indeed have some potential to counteract subjectivist or anthropocentric leanings in ethics and politics because they reveal that the king of modern philosophy, the subject, is not in fact naked, but emotionally clad.

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[45] Lawrence J. Hatab, *Ethics and Finitude: Heideggerian Contributions to Moral Philosophy* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), p. 21-22.

5.5. Engaged Agency

This exposed character of *Dasein*, this "original exposure into the vastness of beings and the depth of being,"[46] has been taken in varying directions in post-Heideggerian literature. We are condemned to be free, if you ask Sartre.[47] If you ask Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, we are condemned to meaning. Taylor takes the second route, that of meaning. We are exposed to a horizon of meanings, a background of significances, or a semantic space. As is clear, Taylor's way of putting the matter is somewhat free of Heidegger's more dramatic tone. The former sketches the portrait of an 'engaged agency,' whereas the latter insists on the thrown character of *Dasein*. Nevertheless, the Heideggerian substrata are evident here. What is especially important, however, is that Taylor fields Heideggerian insights in the service of a nuanced moral thinking, something Heidegger himself never explicitly attempted. In his analysis of emotions and in the conclusions he reaches, Taylor's thought revolves around Heideggerian mood analysis, but he co-opts some of the central motifs of the existential analytic for his particular ethico-political purposes by integrating other philosophical (re)sources; foremost among them being Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty, at least among 20th century thinkers. This venture to develop phenomenological insights toward ethics has been one of Taylor's most distinctive contributions. As Taylor recognizes and explains, engaged agency is agency in a space of meanings. But Taylor does not leave the matter here and goes further: this space is also a moral space. But how is that possible? How is the space of meanings we are in also a moral space?

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[46] Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein"* ed. Susanne Ziegler (*Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 39; Frankfurt-Main: Klostermann, 1980), p. 142; cited in Fred Dallmayr, *The Other Heidegger* (Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 143.

[47] It should, however, be noted that Sartre's thinking involves also a neo-Cartesian element.

In order to see the connection here some further dimensions of the 'emotion-import-situation' pattern need to be unpacked, particularly the linguistic dimension where in which our 'moral feelings' are articulated. But first a recapitulation;: sometimes the appeal of objectivism induces us to think that one needs to getdo away with feelings in order to attain a clear grasp of the a given situation one encounters. But in fact emotions carry the import of the situation to us. Emotions are situationally imbued. Rather than impeding intelligibility or clarity regarding situations, emotions clear reveal the way situations happen as events of human involvement. In other words, the primary mode of the manifestation of morals in situations is through emotions. This surely does not exhaust all our moral engagement. There is also a more rational, maybe somewhat post-emotional plane where we are in what is called 'the space of reasons,' where argumentation, deliberation, and exchange of reasons predominate. But the problem arises when we ontologize this space backwards at the expense of the emotional level by seeing the latter as only obstructive, when it is in fact more originary.

Above it has been shown that imports are what moods or emotions disclose to us regarding situations. Now, in some cases feelings and emotions might be relatively direct and straightforward; that is, they can be expressed in a relatively direct or straightforward way. We might describe an action or an attitude referring to our desires, our immediate wants and intentions or, in Taylor's terms, by referring to our desired consummations: I am hungry, I am tired, or I'd like a taste of that. But in many other cases, such direct and straightforward characterization of our feelings or the sense of our motives would be too weak, or too inadequate, to bear the weight of the emotion we have, to meet the import of the context, or to describe the predicament in the situation we face. In these instances we need some finer description, a richer vocabulary, to catch the import of the situation. They require better and finer articulation because, as emphasized before, these are instances when we are in affective awareness of characteristically human meanings, like shame, indignation, or self-esteem. Some emotions, imports, and motives cannot be characterized merely with reference to our immediate desires and needs, but require reference to emotion

terms which can in turn be meaningful only in connection with other similar terms. For instance, the question, "Why is this situation shameful?" cannot be answered without having recourse to terms very similar to shame in tone and tenor: base, dishonorable, degrading, cheat, liar, coward, fraud.[48] Therefore, our emotion language, especially when it requires finer articulation than a bare reference to immediate desires, constitutes an interlocking series of terms of moral import. What is more, however, is that this vocabulary needs some further distinctions so as to make sense at all. For instance, without a presumed distinction between what is right and what is wrong, remorse would not be open to me as a feeling. Taylor notes, "Some understanding of right/wrong is built into remorse, is essential to its attributing the import that it does." Similarly, in the case of shame, we need worthy and unworthy as terms of distinction.[49] That some moods assail us is possible only because we are already permeable to them, and our vocabulary of emotions and morals is already implicated in these moods.

The whole point here could also be connected to Taylor's elaboration on H. Frankfurt's distinction between first-order and second-order desires. First-order desires are usually our immediate desires that we partly share with other species. We get thirsty, hungry, cold, etc. and as a result we desire food, drink, and warmth. These are examples of first-order desires, which are not necessarily peculiar to our species. Second-order desires, on the other hand, are desires we form *on* other desires; that is, they are desires on desires, in the sense that they evaluate other desires. For Frankfurt, and also Taylor, this is a human distinction,, separating our species from others. But this does not mean that only human beings choose between desires or between different objects of desire. This is certainly not the case, and there are species that choose between desires in the animal kingdom. What is distinctive in our species is that we *evaluate* desires; we evaluate, judge, and mark some

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[48] Taylor, "Self-Interpreting Animals," p. 55.

[49] Taylor, "Self-Interpreting Animals," p. 63-64.

desires as truly desirable and others not truly desirable. This evaluative capacity belongs to us humans. This kind of "reflective self-evaluation" is a human peculiarity.[50]

Taylor embraces this distinction, yet refines it some more. Put this way, the distinction captures only a little of how human agency differs from that of other species. What we encounter in humans is not only the capacity for second-order desires, but also the capacity for *qualitative* evaluation between desires, where what is evaluated are not just desires, but in essence the *motives* underlying given desires. We do not merely choose between desires; we also evaluate the why of our desires, and in this way we appraise the quality of our motivation as noble or base, virtuous or vicious, or higher or lower. Sometimes I "refrain from acting on a given motive – say, spite, or envy – because I consider it base or unworthy."[51]   This level of evaluation seems only partially thematized by the distinction between first and second-order desires. To put his refined adoption of Frankfurt's distinction into sharper profile Taylor proposes a further distinction: weak versus strong evaluation. It is only when we evaluate the relative worth of given desires or the quality of our motivation that we are evaluating strongly, according to Taylor; otherwise, we are weak evaluators, or "simple weighers"[52] between alternatives. Between the two ways of evaluation, the "desirability characterization"[53] constitutes a major difference. In weak evaluation, I am either choosing between different desires or courses of action, or trying to come up with the maximum consummation by combining several; and accordingly, the clash of desires in weak evaluation is of the nature of "contingent incompatibility."[54] In strong evaluation, on the other hand, incompatibility arises not merely

[50] Charles Taylor, "What is Human Agency," in *Human Agency and Language (Philosophical Papers I)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.15-16.

[51] Charles Taylor, "What is Human Agency," p.16.

[52] Charles Taylor, "What is Human Agency", p.23.

[53] Charles Taylor, "What is Human Agency", p.17.

[54] Charles Taylor, "What is Human Agency", p.19.

out of contingent reasons but on a quasi-categorical basis; I am discriminating between motives as to their worth, and this kind of discrimination is even connected to modes of life one may admire or dislike. Thus, in cases of strong evaluation sometimes even the kind of person one would like to be, or the kind of life one would like to live, are at stake. This is because what we evaluate as higher or lower, virtuous or vicious, profound or superficial, clairvoyant or blind, integrating or fragmenting among our motives is better grasped when construed in relation to corresponding evaluations of the qualitative merit of different modes of life, such as noble or base, alienated or free, saintly or merely human, fragmented or integrated. In strong evaluation we are evaluating within a very broad range of concerns, where sometimes even the whole point of our lives is at stake. In other words, in strong evaluation we are on the brink of *eudaimonistic* self-questioning, in which the distinctiveness of our being human comes to light.

What is important at this point, however, is that this broad range of concerns, or this *eudaimonistic* level of interrogation, requires a rich evaluative vocabulary that we do not necessarily need in weak evaluation. This is indeed noticeable in all the characterizations above regarding the qualitative evaluation of motives and modes of life. Only by putting these evaluations within a range of qualitative distinctions, or qualitative contrasts (noble/base, virtuous/vicious, etc.), are we able to articulate the point of the evaluation we do. These articulations are "contrast articulations," inviting a language of evaluative distinctions. A rich background of qualitative distinctions shows up when we strive to articulate our basic attitudes to life.

5.6. Engaged Agency and the Good

Now we can bring together the different threads of the argument. As emphasized before, emotions and our emotion vocabulary comprise terms of distinction such as

right/wrong or worthy/unworthy, especially when the import of the situation or the motive underlying our reaction cannot adequately be characterized by a bare reference to our immediate feelings and desires. But this is better observed when we are engaged in a strong evaluation, which characteristically requires some finer distinctions, a finer vocabulary, and, thus, a vocabulary of qualitative distinctions of worth, which can *in toto* give us a picture of a life worth living, or the good life. Here a complex of connections surfaces all the way from a phenomenological elucidation of moral feelings to visions of the good or the good life. How the good is given to experience, how the good in a variety of ways shows up or is concealed in our moral experience, how it becomes manifest (to us) through our linguistically articulated emotion vocabulary, and in our engaged (mode of) openness to situations, encounters, and experiences, is clarified little by little. Emotions open us to situations bearing certain imports, which are intelligible only through a linguistically mediated and articulated vocabulary of feelings. And what these articulations provide are terms of distinction (or qualitative contrasts) wherein our visions of the good become more or less, that is, more or less articulately, manifest. We are condemned to meaning, adrift in a sea of meanings, but these meanings are of an axiological nature, bearing or permeated with distinctions of worth, which are ultimately structured by the good.

We began with emotional experiences. This was a good starting point because, as Taylor writes, "we can have no dispassionate awareness of the human good"[55] and "part of being good is opening ourselves to certain feelings."[56] Emotional experiences led us to certain distinctions, distinctions of worth. This is the point where we can see how, in White's words, "our capacity for ethical discrimination in its broadest sense is entwined with feeling or sentiment."[57] And in the end we recognized that a constellation of these

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[55] Taylor, "Self-Interpreting Animals", p. 62.

[56] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 555.

[57] Stephen K. White, *Sustaining Affirmation: the Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory* (Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 46.

terms of ethical discrimination, in turn, can highlight a more general notion of the good, or the good life, pervading our judgments, practices, and transactions, implicitly or sometimes explicitly.

As I interpret him, Taylor argues that if we are sufficiently pressed to articulate what is involved in our judgments, actions, reactions, evaluations, and practices, we cannot help referring ultimately to some overriding or overarching figure as the good. Various constellations of contrastive characterizations culminate in a more comprehensive figuration of the good, gathering in a single idea all our aspirations, all our sublime striving. Not just ancient philosophies, wisdom literature, and religion, but also most of our characteristically modern perspectives on ethics and the human predicament, like Kantianism, utilitarianism, and even atheism, are in essence large-scale or comprehensive philosophical articulations of such figures of the good.

At one point Taylor states that our articulated, or interpreted, feelings "ascribe a form to what matters to us."[58] In a similar manner he seems to suggest that the good (or hypergoods and constitutive goods) ascribe a form to what matters to us. What matters to us in its broadest implications takes on a form with reference to the good for us. The good makes us see all our concerns and efforts under a common light. This idea could be connected to a partial Platonism on Taylor's side or, better put, to his quasi-Platonic retrieval of the *alethic* potency of the good. Just as Plato conceives the idea of the good as rendering all other ideas and corresponding realities visible and understandable, in a similar manner the good we embrace and adhere to makes all our ideals, struggles, hopes, and disappointments clear, understandable, and inspiring. But it is critical to note here that for Taylor the term 'good,' and even "the strong good," refers to a fairly broad range of values, "meaning whatever is picked out as incomparably higher in a qualitative distinction." He explains: "It can be some action, or motive, or style of life, which is seen as qualitatively

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[58] Taylor, "Self-Interpreting Animals", p. 64.

superior. 'Good' is used here in a highly general sense, designating anything considered valuable, worthy, admirable, of whatever kind or category."[59]

Invoking the good in relation to the self as a constitutive dimension of selfhood is in effect a way of highlighting the motivational core of ethical agency and experience. As Habermas puts it, taking a leaf from Apel, "Why be moral?" is the central question posed here.[60] Prior to any reflective purchase on or rational-formal instantiation of moral ideals, how is ethical obligation experienced, formed, and felt in the first place? The sources of our readiness to respond to ethical demands, or our responsiveness, response ability, are the primary concern here. In other words, the question is what sort of agentic formation one needs to undergo to become motivationally equipped to respond to relevant demands, to feel obligated in relevant situations, and to maintain ethically upright self-conduct. In Taylor's account, the strong values guiding our strong evaluations or our practical reasoning in general constitute not only the alethic background, but also the motivational footing of our ethical life.[61] But in congruence with the classical understanding of the matter the ethical here needs to be taken in a broader sense, including the political as well, particularly because the motivational requirements of political agency and commitment are as relevant a topic today as the motivational base of the ethical.

Detecting a certain nihilism abounding in all sorts of contemporary political approaches, S. Critchley explores the possibility of ethico-political commitment, and comes to fairly similar conclusions regarding the structure of ethical subjectivity. The structure of

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[59] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 92.

[60] Jurgen Habermas, *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), p. 76.

[61] This focus on the motivational core of ethics and practical reason is one of the distinctive features of Taylor's hermeneutic orientation, according to N. Smith, differentiating his work, for instance, from Gadamer's interest in the "humanist paradigm of judgment" and legal hermeneutics, despite the latter's influence on Taylor. See Nicholas H. Smith, "Taylor and the Hermeneutic Tradition" in Ruth Abbey (ed.) *Charles Taylor* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 45 and p. 50 (n. 41).

ethical experience, on Critchley's view, conforms to a circular pattern of demand and approval, a pattern which in turn represents the constitutive relation between the self and the good. What is meant by ethical experience here is the dawn of ethical commitment on the basis of an approval by the self in the face of a demand. The relation is circular because although the demand one faces and is strongly touched by is not rooted in the self, its dawning, or more properly, its disclosure, is dependent on approval on the part of the self. The very possibility of ethico-political commitment, then, hinges on such a strong approval in the face of a demand, whereby one binds oneself to the good disclosed in the demand and shapes oneself accordingly, to such an extent that it is possible to argue that "the good *founds* the self."[62] In a manner similar to Taylor, Critchley thinks of a very broad range of concerns or figures as possible, and some of them today actual, candidates for the designation 'the good,' such as the Platonic Good beyond Being, the Kantian moral law, the utilitarian greatest happiness of the greatest number, the Nietzschean eternal return, the Heideggerian call of conscience, and so on. This does not mean, however, that one might encounter a strong demand only in terms of such philosophical figurations. Rather, ordinary experiences are in many cases the root of the demand-approval dynamic and ethico-political commitment.

This account allows us to clarify one point in Taylor's notion of strong evaluation. The emphasis above on pre-reflective self-formation in view of the good demands some clarification on the idea of strong values and strong evaluation. Despite Taylor's engaged understanding of agency, this term seems to imply an evaluative stance on the part of the subject, as if the subject confers values on a valueless realm. But the point is just the contrary: the impossibility of unmediated selfhood exemplified in some egological perspectives is what Taylor is trying to establish in all his works. In this sense human agency is never radically evaluative, in the Sartrean sense of the term, for instance; that is,

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[62] Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment Politics of Resistance* (Verso, 2007), p. 20. In delineating this model of ethical agency Critchley mines several different philosophical sources, most notable among them being Levinas.

never projecting values on an essentially valueless universe. Therefore, although the notion of strong evaluation seems to emphasize the role of human subjectivity in ethical orientation, it is crucial to see the non-anthropocentric intent here. What is disclosed, or what Taylor tries to uncover, in our experiences of strong evaluation is the pull and push of certain strong values upon us, their making a claim upon us and thus ordering or prefiguring our ethical orientation and responses. Rather than primarily signifying human subjectivity or evaluative capacity, strong evaluation puts forward the formative role of strong values for our very selfhood. In a sense, strong values are more central in this conception.

Now, in a culture so thoroughly under the sway of subjectivist modes of understanding, this sort of 'moral realism' counteracting value-projectivism might seem difficult to digest. But Taylor's attempt at distilling the good as pre-subjectively structuring our lived experiences is a variation on moral phenomenology's interest in the concrete character of moral values and the human goods we embrace, as it is first indicated, for instance, in Husserl's notion of 'material a priori' of the human, grounding our notions of the good life.[63] This makes our above reference to Scheler once again meaningful, because Scheler also made use of Husserlian phenomenology in his so-called 'material ethics of value.' In particular, Scheler's take on the Husserlian notion of a 'material a priori' sounds consonant with Taylor's idea of strong values, in the sense of referring us to a certain ontological realism with respect to certain characteristically human values and goods. Both use the insights of phenomenology for the purposes of distilling non-subjective values out of our 'core intuitions' experienced most intensely in certain emotions (Scheler), or out of our 'strong evaluations,' again best experienced in certain affective conditions (Taylor).

Strong values are thus strong because of their motivational power and the power of their ontological status. They are strong values because they have a strong motivational

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[63] For the notion of the 'material a priori' and its implications for Taylor's notion of 'strongly valued goods' see John J. Drummond, "Agency, Agents, and (Sometimes) Patients" in J.J. Drummond and J.G. Hart (eds.) *The Truthful and the Good: Essays in Honor of Robert Sokolowski* (Kluwer, 1996), pp. 145-157.

power in ordering our ordinary lives, our dealings with the world and with others. But they are strong values also because they are not just subjective projections onto a neutral world, but rather have some reality of their own. This last contention, which might seem the more controversial of the two, is in fact what a moral phenomenology of our practical existence would lead us to see.

However, at this point we need to keep this comparison with Scheler in reasonable proportion; otherwise the Heideggerian background to Taylor's perspective stressed above may seem problematic. This is because, although Scheler in his analysis of our emotions or felt-valuations is usually seen as heralding Heidegger, one of the most forceful criticisms to Scheler's value-thinking came from Heidegger, despite the latter's otherwise admiring and receptive attitude toward the former. The main target of Heidegger's criticism has always been the subjectivizing bent of value-thinking, as he indicated when he wrote, "Every valuing, even where it values positively, is a subjectivizing," and, "Precisely through the characterization of something as 'a value,' that something is robbed of its worth."[64] In Heidegger's appraisal, despite his immense and admirable phenomenological efforts for substantiating an ethics purged of Kantian formalism and formalism in general, Scheler was ultimately unable to forgo this subjective leaning in value-thinking. Similarly, Gadamer criticized the material ethics of value due to its turning "the critique of idealism … into a metaphysical -- even Thomistic -- ontology of values,"[65] which might in essence be seen almost as "the flip side of a Kantian essentialism"[66]; namely, its professed rival.   And although such an ethics was successful in foregrounding "the substantive contents of

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[64] Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism" in David F. Krell (ed.) *Basic Writings* (Taylor & Francis, 1978), p. 228.

[65] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *A Century of Philosophy: a Conversation with Riccardo Dottori* (Continuum, 2004), p. 20.

[66] Lawrence J. Hatab, *Ethics and Finitude*, p. 98 (n61).

morality, [and] not just the reflective phenomenon of the reason that tests laws,", it was ultimately hostage to "its methodological claim to intuit a priori systems of value."[67]

Scheler's basically Husserlian conviction that intuition or introspection could deliver ethical essences was still over-involved in the transcendental outlook of an earlier phenomenology. Taylor is obviously quite distant from such an understanding. In a more Heideggerian vein, he strives to distill the good from our life-wordly encounters as engaged agents; engaged in a background of tacit meanings, an inter-subjectively shared semantic field, which Taylor also construes as a moral field (he tries to capture the same meanings with terms like strongly qualified horizons or frameworks of qualitative contrast). Having recourse to what he calls the "best account" we can give of our lived experiences of strong goods -- that is, their demand on us, their power and hold on us -- Taylor pursues his philosophical goals not from a transcendental vista, but from a level of concrete human engagement.[68] Thus, he proposes phenomenology as our last resort and affirms hermeneutic circularity here.

5.7. Engaged Agency and Freedom

Now, a number of questions stand out regarding this complex of connections leading to a moral realism of strong values or goods embedded in a life-world, embodied in a form

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[67] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "On the Possibility of a Philosophical Ethics" in *Hermeneutics, Religion, and Ethics* (Yale University Press, 1999), p. 27.

[68] We should note also the influence of Merleau-Ponty and Wittgenstein, the former primarily via his elaboration of the embodied nature of human agency, the latter mainly through his insights into the linguistic instantiations of a shared form of life. But the more general and more vital importance of all the three thinkers (Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Wittgenstein) derives from their decisive role in helping overcome epistemology, or what Taylor calls "the epistemological picture." Another figure worth mentioning here is, of course, Hegel, whose notion of a shared *Sittlichkeit* is of paramount importance for Taylor.

of life, or reserved in a moral space of evaluation. If human agents are so embedded, so engaged and exposed, if our embedding in a background of qualitative distinctions structured by the good, or in a life-world, is so strong and deep, how are innovation, criticism, or, in the end, even freedom possible? Doesn't this picture of human agency imply a heteronomus structure? Are all goods we have or can have internal to our form of life? How is this phenomenologically elucidated presence of the good compatible with freedom? How is engaged agency a free agency?

In fact, one way in which Taylor's overall account of human agency might seem heteronomous or fragile against claims in the name of autonomy is this moral realism underlain with his hermeneutic phenomenology. As engaged agents facing the claims of strong goods, which are sometimes or maybe oftentimes in the tacit background of our world-engagement waiting for articulation, we might seem somewhat locked in a heteronomus matrix of meanings, values, goods, and so on. This picture of human agency recalls what Taylor himself dubs the "porous selves" of pre-modern times, what C. Guignon calls the "extended selves" of pre-modern times, or what B. Parekh calls the "overlapping selves" of some non-Western cultures.[69] As Taylor interprets it, the gradual shift from the porous selves of pre-modern times to what he calls the "buffered selves" of modern societies could and in essence should be considered a gain in the name of human freedom and emancipation. The multiply embedded selves of pre-modern times were, in the face of some already established human purposes and ideals, undergirded by a whole cosmology with correspondences in the social-political realm. Porosity here was not just a matter of moral presence under the claim of some already set ideals and purposes. It was also due to human vulnerability or openness to various non- or extra-human influences, powers, cosmic forces, spirits, demons, or possession for instance. The buffered selves of the modern era, on the other hand, are in large measure closed to such forces, and they are

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[69] Charles Taylor elaborates on this notion in his *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Duke University Press, 2004) and in *A Secular Age*. See also Charles Guignon's *On Being Authentic* (Routledge, 2004), p. 108; and Bhikhu Parekh's *Rethinking Multiculturalism* (Macmillan, 2000).

conceived as capable of disengaging from pre-given ends, norms, conventions, or even horizons. There is a much sharper line separating agents and forces. This is a deep change in sensibility, transforming our experience of the world and ourselves. Taylor explains that such individuals "see themselves as agents who, through disengaged, disciplined action, can reform their own lives as well as the larger social order," adding: "They are buffered, disciplined selves. Free agency is central to their self-understanding."[70] This Taylor recognizes and gives a certain place in his overall account of modern social concepts. Although it is sometimes felt as a profound loss of a certain type of world experience, or as a loss of openness to certain feelings or experiences that results in impoverished sensibilities, he acknowledges that the modern self-understanding sketched here expanded the range and repertoire of individual and collective action. But, then, how does it square with his thoroughly engaged agency, exposed to a semantic field already replete with concerns, meanings, and horizons of significance, sharing a form of life? In a conception in which man's being is characterized so strongly as engaged, or embedded in a background of meanings and concerns, how can autonomy be made sense of, let alone preserved?

As mentioned before, Taylor seeks to uncover the goods and values orienting us in a moral space of inescapable questions, and seeks to do so from a non-subjectivist or non-anthropocentric starting point. Indeed, the elaboration of an ethics without an anthropocentric perspective has been a major task assumed by a variety of thinkers writing on ethics in the post-Heideggerian literature. The task was first to make sense of our ethical-being-in-the-world, as Hatab puts it, or the being of the ethical self. Even Levinas's ethics of the face, for instance, can be seen in this category. Taylor partakes in this ongoing conversation, and in this regard he could be considered among the company of those whose fundamental question is, in Ricoeur's words, "what type of being human freedom must have in order for phenomena such as decision-making and responsibility to be possible."

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[70] Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, p. 21.

Their concern, then, is "the ontological investigation of 'being free.'"[71] Accordingly, Taylor affirms critical agency and freedom, but on the condition that they are held as life-worldly achievements.

Such a concern with non-anthropocentric ethics and interest in an engaged or life-worldly understanding of agency might in some cases lead to a radical questioning of autonomy as the basis of ethics and politics, or it might seem to justify such questioning. Following in the footsteps of Levinas, for instance, Critchley interrogates what he calls the "autonomy orthodoxy" springing mainly from Kant's ethics of autonomous self-legislation of moral maxims. As I understand Critchley, analyzing Kant's idea of the 'fact of reason' and some recent neo-Kantian reworkings of this concept, he tries to unpack a residual heteronomy in the whole Kantian metaphysics of morals. The awe that I feel before the moral law within me, the respect that I feel as an a priori feeling before the authority of the moral law, the facticity of reason that is inevitable if pure reason can be practical and motivationally potent all point to "a moment of rebellious heteronomy that troubles the sovereignty of autonomy."[72] Although the maxims of moral action are autonomously legislated by the moral subject, they must have the properties of necessity and universality so as to attain the status and authority of a universal moral law. What is autonomously legislated here is already a universal law, a law in a kingdom of ends. But the heteronomy here is in a sense good heteronomy because it discloses the fundamental structure of ethical experience and selfhood and, in this way seems, to vindicate Critchley's portrayal of a circle of demand and approval referred to above. In other words, the demand-approval structure underlying ethical agency and commitment is vindicated even by the autonomy orthodoxy originating with Kant. Such vindication is then developed in fruitful ways to envisage an ethics of responsibility, as in the case of Levinas, for instance. What is more

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[71] Paul Ricoeur, *Main Trends in Philosophy* (Holmes & Meier, 1979), p. 296.

[72] Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding*, p. 37. Interestingly, Critchley follows the traces of this autonomy orthodoxy from Kant and Fichte, through Hegel and Marx, to Heidegger.

important, however, is that if this account is accurate, then even freedom is grounded in heteronomy; it is heteronomously structured. "Freedom is not justified by freedom."[73]

This is a perspective questioning the very legitimacy of a claim in the name of autonomy; questioning perhaps its overly presumed character, incontestable self-evidence, or even categorical status. At the heart of many of such perspectives is a deep concern with otherness, alterity, or difference, and this has indeed been a major concern for many political and philosophical thinkers today. S. K. White identifies "responsibility to otherness" as the characteristic concern of much postmodern literature, distinguishing it from the characteristically modernist concern with "responsibility to act."[74] Responsibility to otherness appears to be one of two main outlooks characterizing political thinking today. Rather than agents' capacity and responsibility to act in justifiable ways, the priority is given to responsibility to otherness, to other-demanding concerns. But this already much amplified orientation started to make enormous changes in understandings of agency. Put differently, 'responsibility to otherness' should not be seen as the other side of 'responsibility to act,' but as altering the way responsible agency or agency in general is conceived. Bennet's notion of "distributive agency" might be a good case in point. Bennet proposes to see agency "along an ontological continuum of beings, entities, and forces," including in some sense even "quirky electron flows" and electrical grids.[75] Interestingly,

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[73] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 303; cited in Leora Batnitzky, "Jewish Philosophy After Metaphysics" in Mark A. Wrathall (ed.) *Religion After Metaphysics* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 152.

[74] Stephen K. White, "Heidegger and the Difficulties of a Postmodern Ethics and Politics," *Political Theory*, vol. 18 no. 1 (February 1990), pp. 80-103.

[75] Jane Bennet, "The Agency of Assemblages and the North American Blockout" in Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan (eds.) *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-secular World* (Fordham University Press, 2006), p. 606. In developing this distributive understanding of agency Bennet has recourse to the actor-network theory of Bruno Latour and a number of other sociologists, and finds inspiration also in some versions of ecological thinking, pantheism, vitalism, and materialism. At some points she describes the whole project as a variant of 'ontological monism,' emphasizing "radical kinship of people and things" (p. 614).

this once again evokes Taylor's notion of porous selves or, more properly, his illustration of an enchanted world where boundaries between agents and forces are fuzzy and forces have some agency of their own.

It seems that once the emergence of a disengaged or buffered self and the attendant withdrawal of the porous self were held as achievements in the name of human mastery and autonomy. But in due time this idea has itself started to look somewhat dubious or contestable, or maybe like a mixed blessing. Subsequently philosophers started redirecting our attention to the engaged, if not so porous, character of human agency. Still, at one end of the spectrum ideas of agency akin to the image of a porous self started to appear again; distributing agency, as Bennet does, along a variety of "agentic sites," or a "web of agentic capacities," including not only (social) structures and non-human animals, but also inanimate entities and forces. But again what is more important for our purposes here comes into view when Bennet states that "autonomy and strong responsibility seem to me to be empirically false, and thus their invocation seems tinged with injustice."[76] For an understanding in which agency is conceived in so expansive a way, autonomy and responsibility, or their inherence in distinctively human capacities, and in the end even the possibility of imputation might begin to appear to be flimsy notions. Although in all these accounts 'responsibility to the other' or non-anthropocentric sites of agency and responsibility are explored in truly elegant ways, the whole case sometimes seems to tread too much on the idea of responsible agency and its connection to autonomy. This could indeed be identified as a pervasive difficulty besetting anti-humanism in ethics and politics. As Dallmayr puts it,

> On the cognitive-epistemological level, the main peril of anti-subjectivist positions … is the proclivity toward objectivism: by downgrading individual reason and consciousness they tend to curtail the reflective capacity needed for the critique of knowledge claims. Similarly, in the moral domain, the stress on

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[76] Bennet, "The Agency of Assemblages," p. 615.

preconscious or extra-human structures or contexts is prone to obscure the dimension of human autonomy and responsibility.[77]

Perhaps it is better to see the predicament here as, on the one hand, acknowledging the merits of non-anthropocentrism or post-subjectivism in ethics and politics but, on the other hand, preserving the possibility of responsible agency. As it seems to me, regarding the question of 'responsibility to the other,' Taylor does not think we have to renounce ontology to pave the way for an ethics of responsibility. Neither do we need to renounce ontology to see the 'face of the other' and to assume responsibility, nor displace autonomy to be aware of the life-worldly, engaged character of freedom and its ontological underpinnings. The ontological elucidation of selfhood or responsible agency can be seen as a necessary dimension of responsibility to otherness or acknowledging alterity. Taylor elaborates at considerable length on how inter-subjective identity formation and the good are constitutively connected, especially in his analysis of human identity as dialogical and essentially formed in "webs of interlocution."[78] In a manner similar to Taylor, Ricoeur takes issue with Levinas' uncompromising stress on the other and the requirement of self-divestment, and finds the latter's tenor 'accusative': "[It is] in the *accusative* mode alone that the self is enjoined."[79] But hearing and responding to the other requires a self capable of reflection and good will. On the other hand, one may even cast some doubt on the ethical façade of alterity or otherness that is usually assumed. As Kearney reminds us in a number of places, alterity can also be a monster. Referencing Critchley's perceptive questions, such as "Why is radical otherness goodness? Why is alterity ethical? Why is it not rather evil or

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[77] Fred R. Dallmayr, *Twilight of Subjectivity: Contributions towards a Post-Individualist Theory of Politics* (The University of Massachusetts Press, 1981), p. 30.

[78] Taylor's celebrated intervention in debates over the politics of recognition is another important way he affirms responsibility to the other which gave rise to a whole host of literature.

[79] Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 189. Ricoeur asks in the same place, "How could this sort of instruction be inscribed within the dialectic of giving and receiving, if a capacity for giving in return were not freed by the other's very initiative? Now what resources might these be if not the resources of *goodness* which could spring forth only from a being who does not detest itself to the point of being unable to hear the injunction coming from the other?"

an-ethical or neutral?" Kearney challenges adherence to the ethics of alterity on its own terms.[80] As Tracy reads him, the other "might be a monster" and "not to face this possibility could be … deadly." Tracy adds, "He shows us the need for some kind of criteria, especially ethical criteria, for assessing what shows up, what shows itself."[81]

When it comes to enlarging the scope of agency, Taylor seems to me unwilling to abandon some distinctiveness or exceptionalism on the part of human agency. But this is at least with two critical provisos: first, the distinctiveness affirmed here does not quite conform to the more conventional models, where human rationality, mastery, responsibility and autonomy are affirmed against an empirical, objective frame, or a frame in which the self is "buffered." In Taylor, agency is affirmed from within a non-subjectivist account of human world-engagement, or as what is sometimes called 'situated subjectivity.' Even the distinctively Merleau-Pontyean notion of 'body intentionality' is incorporated into Taylor's engaged understanding of agency. Second, and maybe more important, however, are Taylor's strictures against the radical humanization of agency, or the exclusive humanization of agency; hence his label "exclusive humanism" for a host of modern perspectives. It is here that Taylor seems in line with conceptions of non-human or extra-human modes of agency. Yet what Taylor seems to recognize at most here are nature, as a deep ecologist, and God, as a theist. Bennet's horizon, on the other hand, disseminates agency even to electrical grids or technological entities. From Taylor's perspective this would probably seem to be yet another attempt at 'ontic enchantment' of nature he criticizes among a number of modern, post-Enlightenment currents of thought and most dramatically epitomized in Hegel's philosophy of Spirit.

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[80] Richard Kearney, *The God Who May Be* (Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 77.

[81] David Tracy, "God: the Possible/Impossible" (interview by Christian Sheppard) in J. P. Manoussakis (ed.) *After God: Richard Kearney and the Religious Turn in Continental Philosophy* (Fordham University Press, 2006), p. 341.

5.8. Beyond Autonomy and Heteronomy?

Taylor recognizes the force and legitimacy of autonomy as a modern ideal, and affirms it somehow. As it seems to me, however, what Taylor seeks to achieve is to shelter a space beyond autonomy and heteronomy, or to cover a ground where freedom will neither fall victim to vacuity, which might possibly arise out of aspirations for radical autonomy, which is what Taylor sees as the upshot of various modern philosophies, nor be captivated or assimilated by forces of heteronomy. In interpreting Taylor this way I get my bearings from Schrag's exegesis of Kierkegaard, particularly the latter's construal of conscience, envisioning the call of conscience and its authority over us as coming from somewhere beyond autonomy and heteronomy. As Schrag makes clear, for Kierkegaard "heteronomy leads to legalism, autonomy to lawlessness, which is simply a reaction against legalism." The voice of conscience is not giving me my own law, which is, again, a form of lawlessness. But it is not heteronomy, either, because the call of conscience does not come to us from prescriptions external to us. It is voiced both "through" us as well as "about" us. It is an experience in which autonomy and heteronomy are transcended. For Kierkegaard, one cannot achieve autonomy without some third factor moving one toward the search for autonomy in the first place. In Schrag's words, "The weakness of an ethical autonomy is the lack of a compelling factor which arouses the self to its freedom in which it can become itself."[82]

I see in Taylor's account of strong evaluation and the gist of his picture of human agency a similar structure. Strong evaluations "involve discriminations of right or wrong, better or worse, higher or lower, which are not rendered valid by our own desires, inclinations, or choices, but rather stand independent of these and offer standards by which

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[82] Schrag, *Existence and Freedom*, p. 157-158.

they can be judged."[83] It is we who do the evaluation, we who do the work of evaluation, but in such a way that we are thereby evaluated. Our work of evaluation is the way strong values evaluate us; we are in the grip of our self-evaluation. The nuance here could also be captured by relating the point to the analysis of moods and emotions above; the states in which we find ourselves and which are not completely or primarily under our control. Sometimes moral feelings inform us of situations and predicaments more than our deliberate judgments and estimations. This is most apparent in such perplexing or odd cases as when we *feel* shameful or guilty despite the absence of any clear challenge to our plain convictions about shame or guilt, that is, despite the fact that we *think* we shouldn't feel that way. This is why Heidegger underscores the way moods put us before ourselves. But the other way is also open; that is, there can be cases when we *think* we ought to feel shameful or guilty yet, perhaps to our own surprise, we do not actually *feel* that way.

The reason his frame sometimes seems largely heteronomous is his transcendentalism of sorts; or better put, his transcendentalism regarding sources of fullness or moral sources. Taylor has indeed been accused of heteronomy, which in some versions was more of a theonomy. His frame was held to be completely heteronomous, and not friendly to what is sometimes called 'immanent flourishing.' Taylor himself engages most of these debates. Ultimately it is a question of philosophical traditions, perspectives, or, maybe more deeply, "existential faiths," as Connolly puts it.[84] And it is true that neither a Levinasian in his/her thirst for alterity (for the wholly other), nor a Kantian in his/her commitment to autonomy would find Taylor's approach wholly satisfactory. Still, we need not settle for leaving or dissolving debate and dialogue by cataloging these differences as emanations of incommensurable philosophies. We could rather try to see how Taylor could embrace autonomy or freedom despite and together with his transcendentalism of sorts. Ideas of natural goodness, or Aristotelian naturalism in some of its forms, have always emphasized

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[83] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 4.

[84] William E. Connolly, *Pluralism* (Duke University Press, 2005), p. 25.

man's natural capacities, possibilities, needs and limitations, appealing to a certain understanding of human nature. In some versions, this tends toward a more political formulation, as in the case of Nussbaum's idea of "Aristotelian Social Democracy." Taylor, although he would well agree with a general affirmation of human natural goodness or human goods as defined with reference to man's natural possibilities, would include a more diversified understanding of the good and affirmation of goods transcending the merely human; goods which are sometimes even in conflict with a merely mundane or ordinary attainment of life goods. More succinctly, goods cannot be confined to life goods alone. In such an enlargement of the idea of the good, Taylor's historico-philosophical reference is to our post-axial conceptions of human goodness. By post-axial Taylor refers to notions of human goodness that find realization of human potentials not merely in the pursuit of ordinary human desires and needs, but 'also' in deeper human cravings and aspirations; aspirations to transcendence, to the extra-mundane, or cravings for the beyond of the intra-cosmic. What is distinctive in these kinds of aspirations expressed in various post-axial religions, philosophies, and wisdom literature is that they might sometimes even require us to break free from our normal ways of human flourishing. In most cases they comprise an appeal to modes of human flourishing which might bring about misery or suffering in ordinary human terms. Dying on the cross or martyrdom are obvious cases in point. But such modes of human flourishing are not necessarily limited to religion; they appear also in patriotic acts, philanthropic struggles, and even green or deep ecological concerns. What is common to them all is an aspiration to some fullness or consummation beyond the merely human, or to a mode of human flourishing which cannot be exhausted in the immediacy of ordinary human life. As I see it, on Taylor's view in such orientation to transcendence our ethical horizons and eudaimonistic concerns see their broadest and deepest expression, because what he calls the "transformation perspective" is best maintained and safeguarded under such an orientation. Even the "affirmation of ordinary life," to use Taylor's term of art signifying a pervasive sensibility in modernity, was in the beginning deeply connected to this dimension of transcendence. "The striving to surpass ourselves," says Taylor, "can also be seen as essentially human. …And what is more, the transcendent can be seen as

endorsing or affirming the value of ordinary human attention and concern, as has undoubtedly been the case with the Judaeo-Christian tradition, with decisive consequences for our whole moral outlook."[85] Thus, Taylor affirms transcendence in some sense and gives it a Platonic flavor. As Voegelin notes, "Concerning the content of the Agathon [the good] nothing can be said at all. This is the fundamental insight of Platonic ethics. The transcendence of the Agathon makes immanent propositions concerning its content impossible."[86] But this might also bring to mind I. Murdoch's perceptive remark that the emptiness of the good is usually held as a condition of the possibility of freedom. Although one can certainly not describe Taylor the hermeneuticist as subscribing to a notion like the emptiness of the good, his understanding of 'articulation' as a never-ending process provides something similar for him. As Maeve Cooke tries to show, representations of the good society with a view of a transcendent ethical object, which can never fully or exhaustively be represented in language and thought, have both a disclosive and orienting capacity.[87]

Now, to recapitulate, as I see it, Taylor seeks to give us a felicitous account of freedom as beyond radical autonomy and heteronomy. But the extent to which he succeeds at that is open to debate and the objective itself might seem indeterminate for many. According to Jean-Luc Nancy, for instance, "What is undoubtedly one of the most significant of contemporary ethical investigations ... into the 'ideal of authenticity' is left as though hanging halfway between these two directions."[88] But Taylor's ethics of authenticity

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[85] Charles Taylor, "Critical Notice of Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and ethics in Grek Tragedy and Philosophy*" (Book Review) , *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 18:4 (1988:Dec.), p. 813.

[86] Eric Voegelin, *Plato and Aristotle* (Order and History, v. 3) (Louisiana State University Press, 1995 [1957]), p. 112.

[87] Maeve Cooke, *Re-Presenting the Good Society* (MIT Press, 2006).

[88] Jean-Luc Nancy, "Heidegger's "Originary Ethics"" in F. Raffoul and D. Pettigrew (eds.) *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy* (SUNY Press, 2002), p. 73.

may indeed be seen as a nuanced account of his attempt at establishing a ground beyond autonomy and heteronomy.

5.9. Ethics of Authenticity

In line with the Canadian title of the book, *The Malaises of Modernity*, *The Ethics of Authenticity*[89] begins with a brief account of some, actually three, malaises of modernity which sometimes lead to total condemnations of some of the central features of modernity and modern life. The three malaises are individualism and a consequent loss of meaning and moral horizons beyond the self; the ascendancy of instrumental reason and a corresponding withering away of (substantive) ends; and a loss of freedom, more particularly, the loss of political freedom and political control over our destiny. Taylor is primarily concerned with achieving a qualified salvage of modernity, and modern freedom, against both "its boosters and knockers" by highlighting the ethical kernel of modernity against its debased forms. In other words, the book is intended to give an uplifting reading of core modern ideals. In order to do this, Taylor follows the argumentative strategy of identifying, uncovering, and clarifying the noble core in central modern moral ideals, especially the concept of authenticity, and then confronting this noble core with the debased versions of those ideals. What Taylor aspires to achieve here is "a work of retrieval," as he describes it. But identifying the noble elements in moral ideals opens up a more general question concerning the nature and possibility of moral argumentation, which is a question that is itself intimately tied to the very concern of the book. The task before Taylor at this point is to defend the possibility of reasoned argumentation with others about the relative merits or demerits of various moral ideals, as well as the propriety of different practices in terms of those ideals. Therefore, the task also involves a refutation of moral

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[89] Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Harvard University Press, 1992).

relativism. In addition to all these daunting tasks, Taylor also aims at making us believe that the whole argument in favor of (the noble core of) modern freedom and authenticity could make a concrete change in our world; it could release some new and fresh energies to defy the major engines of instrumental reason, the market and the bureaucratic state. Put differently, Taylor challenges the opinion that we are locked in "an iron cage" from which no definitive exit is possible, and instead encourages us to go against the prevailing pessimism, or cynicism, in today's world, and invites us to rescue the promises of modern developments from further degradation.

The three malaises that Taylor identifies are in fact highly interrelated. Although it is seen by many as one of the greatest achievements of modernity, individualism also breeds detachment from moral horizons that once gave a certain order and meaning to our lives. Left to themselves and separated from older horizons of meaning and action, individuals are prone to a loss of purpose in their dealings with the world. This bad turn of individualism, along with the resulting gradual loss of moral horizons, prepares the ground for the primacy of instrumental reason, which, no longer restricted by any comprehensive moral horizon, now strikes against every dimension of life. In turn, the growing hegemony of instrumental reason, coupled with excessive interest in private satisfaction and self-centeredness, empower the impersonal mechanisms of modern life to such a degree that we lose our political freedom at the hands of "soft despotism," as very well illustrated, in Taylor's view, by Tocqueville. In this way the three malaises mutually feed and reinforce each other.

Despite this bleak picture, however, Taylor finds real promise in the background. In the case of individualism and the culture of self-fulfillment, for instance, he discerns a "powerful moral ideal at work," "that of being true to oneself," "however debased and travestied its expression might be" today. Though the whole language of self-fulfillment and being true to oneself sometimes takes absurd forms, and even though contemporary individualistic culture now and again turns into egoism, moral laxism, or self-indulgence, one needs to understand why this moral ideal is so powerful in order to understand why it

takes various debased and unpleasant turns. Before further elaborating on this point, Taylor attempts to identify the sources of the current failure to notice this underlying ideal. The major reason for this failure is our perpetuation of an "inarticulate debate" about the modern ideal of authenticity and freedom, where respective positions in the debate are not sufficiently articulated. On the one hand are the detractors (the knockers) of this ideal, who see the modern culture of authenticity as merely a cover-up for egoism. Such an outlook is an impediment to a thorough grasp of the force of this ideal, because a total discrediting of authenticity forestalls realization of its full implications. On the other hand are the proponents (the boosters) of it, who lean on a kind of "soft relativism" in defending authenticity, and consider the "vigorous defense" of any ideal to be implausible. But this is self-defeating and self-contradictory, simply because even relativism is backed by a moral ideal and because an espousal of authenticity on relativistic grounds precludes a proper defense of it; hence the inarticulate debate. What Taylor calls the "liberalism of neutrality," to which the culture of authenticity is intimately linked, aggravates this condition of inarticulacy by pushing the question of the good (life) to the margins.

Taylor gives two more reasons hindering proper articulation here. One is the "hold of moral subjectivism in our culture"; that is, the idea that moral disputes cannot be arbitrated by reason and moral ideals are not grounded in reason or anything beyond the human. Although there are thinkers who counter this position by arguing in favor of standards rooted in reason or, following Aristotle, human nature, and who think different ways of life can in fact be ranked or compared in terms of their ethical merit, these thinkers are usually not sympathetic to the ideal of authenticity, and hence see no reason to articulate it. (It is worth noting that here Taylor mentions MacIntyre.) The third factor behind this inarticulacy is the current state of social scientific explanations, which do not recognize any real role, any explanatory power, for moral ideals in social-political transformation. The social sciences are fond of explaining every process or change in terms of non-moral factors. Accordingly, individualism and the rise of instrumental reason are explained solely as by-products of macro-social changes such as urbanization, increased mobility, changes

in the mode of production, and so on. What is left out of such accounts is the inherent power of moral ideals in shaping human (moral) motivations and thus spawning the roots of social change. The social sciences build their explanations upon unidirectional causalities, where ideals are epiphenomenal. Here we find a theme that recurs in most of Taylor's writings. One of his outstanding merits is his determination and ability to reveal the role and power of (moral) ideals in concrete transformations. He pursues this theme also in accounting for the formation of what he calls "closed world structures"; that is, visions of the 'world,' in the Heideggerian sense of the term, "with no place … for the transcendent." More recently he has attempted a new formulation of this general orientation in his thinking with recourse to the notion of the 'social imaginary.'[90]

What is lacking, then, in the contemporary moral scene is an adequate articulation of the core moral ideals of modernity. Articulation for Taylor is not merely a way of correcting a distorted idea. Rather, it has a moral dimension, because the true articulation of a moral ideal makes it more accessible and appealing to its practitioners. The book itself is an attempt to articulate the modern ideal of authenticity. For this purpose, Taylor first turns to the sources of authenticity; that is, the historical-intellectual antecedents to the culture of authenticity. In somewhat chronological order these sources are: "the individualism of disengaged rationality pioneered by Descartes"; "the political individualism of Locke"; romantic critiques of disengaged rationality and atomism; the ideas of morality as a voice of nature within us and self-determining freedom as articulated by Rousseau and, in the case of the latter, also by Kant, taken in a more moral sense; and the "principle of originality" as found in Herder. The culture of authenticity, even in its most debased forms, has its roots in this long line of development.

Taylor then takes up the issue of the possibility of rational debate with others on moral matters. This issue is critical because sometimes, even frequently, the culture of

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[90] Charles Taylor, "Closed World Structures" in Mark A. Wrathall (ed.) *Religion after Metaphysics* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 47-68.

authenticity paves the way for a kind of "soft relativism." Choices and decisions are justified primarily in terms of being chosen by agents without appeal to any source beyond themselves. So how can one argue in reason with those who maintain such a position? The overall strategy pursued by Taylor here is to show the existence of what he calls "inescapable horizons" for the very possibility of meaningful, or significant, choices in life. In developing this theme Taylor gives a brief account of the nature of moral argument, or practical reasoning, which, as he puts it, always requires some background significances or horizons. He also provides a glimpse of his philosophical anthropology, which he more fully develops elsewhere. Here the notion of dialogicality as the fundamental condition of human agency is crucial in Taylor's account. Human self-definition and self-discovery are dependent upon our dialogical relations in various forms with others and "our acquisition of rich human languages of expression." We make our choices within certain horizons of significance which are more or less given. Outside, or in the absence of, these horizons, choices lose their moral relevance. True authenticity requires non-anthropocentric, therefore non-subjectivist, sources or frameworks of significance. This is why argument in reason with others on moral matters is feasible. But this also shows that a merely procedural liberalism is inadequate for meeting the challenge of the need for recognition of difference, because, like choices, "recognizing difference … requires a horizon of significance, in this case, a shared one." It requires "commonalities of value … and one of the crucial ways we do this is sharing a participatory political life."

Taylor also tries to expose the ways the ethic of authenticity slides into subjectivism. He distinguishes two levels here. At the level of popular culture he observes slides toward self-centered modes of fulfillment; and at the level of high culture he sees the traces of nihilism and the negation of all horizons of significance. The latter deveopment, which Taylor associates with the names of Nietzsche, Foucault, and Derrida, actually intensifies the former by giving it deeper philosophical support. The problem with these postmodern thinkers lies in their "paradoxical impact": on the one hand they deconstruct the very

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sovereignty and notion of the self but, on the other hand, they ultimately exalt and empower the self due to their elimination of any beyond-human source of true value.

In explaining the chain of influences here Taylor makes recourse to developments in modern art. The shift from art as mimesis to art as creation is particularly revealing at this point. The latter conception of art gradually, or, more specifically, beginning in the 1800s, elevated artistic expression, or creation, as the paradigm example of authenticity. Art has gradually become the primary medium of self-discovery. But once it is conceived not in mimetic terms but in terms of the artist's authentic aesthetic experience and sensibility, or, stated differently, once its legitimate locus is seen solely within the artist himself/herself, art begins to confront morality, or moral conventions, sometimes in the name of challenging social conformity as the arch enemy of authenticity. Here one can see how some forms of authenticity are pitched against morality.

Authenticity, thus, can develop in many branches, but not all of them are equally legitimate or desirable. In order to make a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate varieties Taylor develops a useful formulation. He draws two sets of requirements for the achievement of authenticity. The first set (A) involves 1) creation, construction, and discovery; 2) originality; and 3) opposition to conventions of society and morality. The second set (B) contains 1) openness to horizons of significance; and 2) self-definition in dialogue. For Taylor, embracing one of these sets at the expense of the other is unacceptable. Legitimate forms of authenticity can only develop by giving due weight to both sets of demands. Another highly useful distinction Taylor proposes is between what he calls the "self-referentiality of manner" and the "self-referentiality of matter." Modern freedom is almost inconceivable without the former, but this does not mean that we are exclusively on our own (relying on our human capacities alone) in giving expression to our freedom and authenticity. On the contrary, we, more particularly modern artists, still build upon, or give expression to, something beyond us. Taylor refers to a number of celebrated modern poets who endeavor to articulate "subtler languages," meanings, or sensibilities rooted somewhere beyond.

Why is authenticity ultimately an ideal worth pursuing or defending for Taylor? Inviting us to a work of retrieval for the higher elements behind this ideal, Taylor redefines the nature and terms of the debate. It is no longer a debate "*over* authenticity, for or against, but *about* it, defining its proper meaning." And it is a worthy ideal because it "opens an age of responsibilization," where there is a promise of "a more self-responsible life," a fuller, "richer mode of existence," "because more fully appropriated as our own."

Now although Taylor details the long pedigree behind the ideal of authenticity, Romanticism and existentialism stand out as two major sources giving this ideal its current shape. But these two sources also need to be distinguished in terms of their subtly differing concerns. As Carman makes clear, although Heidegger's negative appraisals of inauthenticity as average everydayness or 'falling' still seem to resonate with Romantic themes of anonymity and banality reigning in society and concomitant estrangement, alienation, and self-dispersal his positive account of authenticity signifies not basically wholeness or integrated self-hood, but a continual projection, or a "thrown projection into future possibilities." The crucial difference is that Heidegger's point of departure is not the Romantic concern with a "normative ideal of integrated selfhood." [91] On the other hand, as I see it, Taylor folds existential insights into Romantic concerns. Authenticity in Taylor is not only a matter of having access to the inner depths of the self, but is also and more substantially an ever-incomplete project enacted throughout the course of one's life. Integration here can only be achieved by way of narrative mediation, which always involves some projection toward possibilities and participates in other narratives beyond the self. Taylor elaborates a "narrativist conception of authenticity,"[92] where storied selfhood might assume varying plots, and its narrative emplotment might go in more than

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[91] Taylor Carman, "Authenticity" in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (ed.) *A Companion to Heidegger* (Blackwell, 2005), 285-296. See also Carman, 'The Concept of Authenticity" in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (eds.) *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 229-39.

[92] Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, p. 140.

one direction. Therefore, authenticity is not the self reaching a standpoint of consummation or completion, but is at most part of an ongoing quest always storied. The expressive freedom underlying the ideal of authenticity then takes its bearings from a dialogical horizon, from an inter-narrative background. It is not just autonomy, because it is neither spontaneous nor legislative of a universal moral law; and it is not heteronomy, because it is not hostage to any one narrative or appropriation of given horizons of significance.

5.10. Ethics of the Good and Critique

Previously we highlighted one way in which Taylor's whole project might seem fragile or wanting due to its moral realism and engaged understanding of agency. But there is a second way in which Taylor's perspective might fall back on heteronomy. Taylor's stress on practices and forms of life, his *Sittlich* leanings, might expose his position to a social heteronomy and bring his approach to the brink of a contextualism *à la* MacIntyre. Indeed, in political theory it is commonplace to locate Taylor among so-called communitarian critics of liberalism.

Taylor's affirmation of a substantive ethics of the good must be obvious from the preceding account. But in a number of ways Taylor strives to guard this vision from a restrictive contextualism or narrow communitarianism. He tries to reconcile this ethics of the good with critique, and to come up with an ethico-political vision offering critical potential. In order to proceed in this venture Taylor attempts to uncover the underlying reasons and motives behind opposition to any substantive ethics of the good, in addition to further clarifying his own aspirations. Questions pertaining to the contrast or divergence between substantive and procedural conceptions of ethics and politics constitute a central feature of contemporary debates in moral and political philosophy. One of Taylor's principal concerns in recent years has been to attempt to uncover the underlying motives

behind the current appeal of proceduralist theorizing among students of ethics and politics. Procedural ethics here refers to the "subsumption of the good under the right." The substantive conception as a counter-thesis, on the other hand, is premised on the idea that "every ethics is founded upon a fundamental concept of the good."[93] Among contemporary versions of the proceduralist variety, Taylor finds Apel's and Habermas's theories of discourse ethics the most sophisticated due to their success in resolving some of the characteristic problems of procedural theories, particularly the problem of monologicality, as seen in Kant, for instance. Yet, despite their sophistication and highly nuanced character, these theories still suffer from their mistaken position on the question of the primacy of the right over the good, though this assessment is not intended as a wholesale denial of every type of procedural theorizing. Rather, what Taylor aims to highlight is at most a "significant" reformulation, or restatement, of procedural ethics in substantive terms. For Taylor, at bottom this question, and the confrontation between substantive and procedural theories in general, concerns the relation between ethical and meta-ethical questions.

In order to substantiate his theses Taylor turns to MacIntyre's *After Virtue* project as a special and distinctive type of substantive ethics. In fact, it seems that Taylor is trying to articulate his own position *vis-à-vis* substantive and procedural theories by way of a critical comparison between MacIntyre and various procedural theories. Taylor first treats MacIntyre's contentions about the construction of moral theories. MacIntyre argues that the gradual entrenchment of the fact-value divide, or the principle that "no ought can be derived from an is," in modern civilization reflects and leads to a sidelining and even a rejection of a central element of ancient ethics; namely, the concept of teleology. More importantly, however, MacIntyre also argues that the decline of teleological thinking is not just an outcome of accomplishments in science or developments in epistemology. It also comes along with a new vision of "man's moral and spiritual predicament," as Taylor puts it. Taylor concurs with MacIntyre in that both oppose explanations of changes in moral

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[93] Charles Taylor, "The Motivation behind a Procedural Ethics", in R. Beiner and W.J. Booth (eds.) *Kant and Political Philosophy: the Contemporary Legacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 337.

outlook in modern times simply with reference to scientific or epistemological developments. It is usually held that scientific discoveries and the mechanization of our world-picture changed or necessitated changes in our moral outlook. Such explanations, however, are one-way or unidirectional. Both MacIntyre and Taylor argue that the other way is also open; that is, a) changes in morality, or in the understanding of morality, are encouraged by changes in moral vision, and b) changes in moral and spiritual vision influenced and contributed to the appeal of the scientific outlook. One of the examples Taylor gives here is the theological incentive to embrace mechanism, against the Greek conceptions of a fixed cosmos, in the 17th century, as a more proper way of affirming God's sovereignty over his creation; hence, a change in spiritual vision leading, or contributing, to a change in 'scientific' outlook. Furthermore, what we might call theological voluntarism then finds its parallel in the human realm. Rejection of a teleological cosmic order or nature, where we are set and where we find our "paradigm purposes," in favor of a neutral nature, including our passions, for instance, which await our control, is celebrated as a way of affirming man's freedom and dignity. This is why it is untenable to think that the modern meta-ethics of the fact-value split is "a truth, at last discovered." Rather, only certain ethical outlooks, conceptions of human agency, and, more particularly, in Taylor's terminology, the disengaged subject of much modern thought, make such a conceptual dichotomy possible. Thus far, Taylor is in agreement with MacIntyre on the latter's assessment regarding the construction of moral theories and the fate of ethics in modern times; that is, regarding the decline of the teleological perspective and thus the implausibility of purely scientistic explanations of it, or of moral change in general.

In fact, Taylor is restating some of MacIntyre's ideas in his own terms. As Taylor sees it, both are trying to unmask, in slightly different ways, "the spuriously independent validity of certain meta-ethical propositions."[94] Major differences, however, appear after this point. The question is where to go and how to proceed after showing the biases of split

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[94] Charles Taylor, "The Motivation behind a Procedural Ethics", p. 342.

theories, or the modern fact-value meta-ethic. One possibility Taylor considers is to argue that this meta-ethic is not only biased but also false, and to push for a better and more accurate one ("let us call it for short Aristotelian"), as MacIntyre already does. Usually, those who tread this path aim at showing us the inadequacy or even incoherence of the modern meta-ethic in the face of our ordinary moral experience and reasoning, which is replete with, or constituted by, "virtue terms that cannot be neatly segmented into descriptive and evaluative components." Although Taylor shares this assessment, he does not think this ought to lead one to conclude that the modern ethics of disengaged freedom is refuted. Such a conclusion would be too hasty in Taylor's view. He instead considers what can be saved or salvaged from the moral vision underlying the modern ethics of disengaged freedom. At one point Taylor calls this "the rescue question." Perhaps by articulating it in a more sophisticated way that would be sensitive to the mentioned inadequacies, this ethic might be uplifted and thus rescued.

Beyond this, however, Taylor notices another question concerning how far it is possible for one to escape the Aristotelian forms of moral reasoning (Aristotelian meta-ethic). Assuming that Aristotle's perspective provides us with a better account of ethical pragmatics how is it possible to avoid it in practice? Taylor regards this question as highly relevant for our overall evaluation of modern civilization; which is why he refers to this question as "the diagnostic question," signifying its relevance for our diagnosis of modernity. He detects two possible answers to this question. One view is that people cannot escape virtue terms and the notion of a good life (the Aristotelian meta-ethic in general), even though they can deny or depart from them in theory. The other view is that people can in fact escape the Aristotelian terms but only to their detriment. Taylor sees MacIntyre as leaning toward the second view, because the latter charges modern society with being an arena of emotivist lifestyles. As Taylor writes, "Consequently, he tends to take modern society at the face value of its own dominant theories, as leading for runaway atomism and breakup." But Taylor himself sympathizes with the first way of seeing our relation to the Aristotelian framework, and therefore reads modern moral life differently. In fact, he says,

"We are far more Aristotelian than we allow, and hence our practice is in some significant way based less on pure disengaged freedom and atomism than we realize".[95]

Yet, he agrees with MacIntyre that largely in theory, but also to a considerable degree in practice, we have moved to an ethics of rules at the expense of an ethics of virtues. According to MacIntyre, in many of the dominant moral and political theories today, and more specifically in Rawls, virtues are derivative from rules of right. In response, he celebrates a moral perspective originating in the virtues. This Taylor finds very close to his own intention; that is, to articulate "an ethic whose more basic concept is the good." In fleshing this out Taylor returns to Aristotle's understanding of the relation between virtues and the good. Taylor identifies two kinds of qualities that virtues in Aristotle refer to: a) qualities as particular facets or features of the good life, that is, virtues as constitutive of the good life; and b) qualities generating, preserving, and maintaining the good life, namely, "preserving qualities." What MacIntyre shows, as Taylor makes clear, is that this dual understanding of virtues (as both constitutive of, and instrumental for, or preserving, the good life) is largely lost in many modern theories where virtues are merely instrumental goods. In Aristotle, on the other hand, there is a particular understanding of the good. Aristotle cites or enumerates many preserving qualities/virtues, but he considers them *also* as part of the good (life). Now, in modern theories the notion of virtues as both constitutive and a "causal condition of the good" is largely lost, because an important feature of modern reason is to differentiate means from ends. In line with this formal-instrumental rationality, modern moral theories have opted for specifying the targeted good and then the qualities required to attain that good. This has been the case for utilitarianism and indeed for any theory recognizing the ultimacy of rules in moral life. All this has rendered virtues as more and more instrumental and secondary in ethics, because "if the basic point of morality is to do right actions, then the virtues must be seen as purely executive." Thus interpreted, the place or role of virtues in a moral theory indicates whether it is framed in Aristotelian or

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[95] Charles Taylor, "The Motivation behind a Procedural Ethics", p. 344.

modern terms. Taylor finds this interpretation apt. As he says, "MacIntyre is right to see the place accorded the virtues as a kind of litmus test for discriminating Aristotelian from modern ethical theory." However, for Taylor, as a slight difference in perspective, the place of the good needs to be made the central issue, "because … this enables us to get faster to the motivational core of these theories."[96]

At the motivational core of modern (procedural) ethical theories, Taylor identifies two main concerns, one being epistemological, the other moral. The epistemological one pertains to the consideration that an ethics centering on a notion of the good presupposes certain metaphysical concepts, like a normative human nature, that are no longer viable. In contrast, an ethics based on the primacy accorded to rules and procedures is thought to be free from this obstacle. Moral concern, on the other hand, relates first to the issue of the possibility or range of freedom in a substantive (Aristotelian) theory, which construes our paradigm purposes as antecedently given by nature, or the cosmos, and by the notion of the good the theory is attached to. Modern notions of reason and agency, however, disengage us from any antecedently provided or naturally given purposes and sources. Secondly, because the Aristotelian framework is too close to a particular form of life, it deprives us of a critical attitude and universal validity. What "a theory that makes rules ultimate" is supposed to achieve is just this critical and universal attitude allowing much more space for freedom. Should one, then, opt for procedural theories in order to affirm the modern notion of freedom? Needless to say, Taylor is not a proceduralist in orientation. Indeed, simple or pure proceduralism is an incoherent idea, according to Taylor, because even to be able to clarify their (above) motivations, procedural theories inevitably need to articulate their underlying notion of the good. "The very structure of a moral theory" requires this. Therefore, again, only if it is reformulated in substantive terms, only if its substantive underpinnings are clarified, can a procedural theory come to be coherent and viable.

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[96] Charles Taylor, "The Motivation behind a Procedural Ethics", pp. 346-7.

Apart from this, however, the presumption that only a procedural theory could achieve a critical attitude and release us from the blind prejudices associated with existing practices and institutions (the status quo in general) is also ill-conceived according to Taylor. In order to show this, Taylor points to a critical difference between Plato and Aristotle, a difference regarding the nature of moral reasoning and the issue of "how closely one's ethical theory is tied to existing practice."[97] Normally, and in terms of the question of the structure of a viable moral theory, both Plato and Aristotle are on the same page against procedural ethics. Both hold a substantive perspective. But with respect to the nature of moral reasoning and the level of our ethical theory vis-à-vis our practices, they diverge from each other. Plato represents what Taylor calls the "revisionist" attitude in ethics due to the former's tendency to question all the goods ordinarily held and pursued by people in life in terms of an independent good. As Taylor writes, "All the de facto goods people pursue in life can be sacrificed unless they are tested against an independent criterion of the good."[98] This also means that practices need to be checked by independent criteria. Thus, in Plato we find an exemplary case of a substantive ethics that is also critical. Aristotle, on the other hand, has a much more practice-based conception of ethics, which Taylor calls "comprehensive." No good can be excluded from the good life, because all goods we seek in life are to some extent constitutive of the good life, "in their correct rank and proportion." Aristotle seems much more emphatic on the role and significance of our "implicit" understanding of the prevailing practices in our moral reasoning. Such an implicit understanding, as later theorized in varying forms by Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Polanyi, can never be foregrounded entirely; it can never be translated into a cluster of independent criteria completely.[99] Hence the centrality of *phronesis* in our ethical life and experience.

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[97] Charles Taylor, "The Motivation behind a Procedural Ethics", p. 351.

[98] Charles Taylor, "The Motivation behind a Procedural Ethics", p. 352.

[99] Charles Taylor, "The Motivation behind a Procedural Ethics", pp. 350-51.

Here Taylor reads into the Platonic-Aristotelian paradigm a meta-ethical dispute. Each gives his own "reasons of principle"; Plato urging recognition of anr independent criterion of the good, and Aristotle stressing the goods and common practices "that people actually have in a given society" as the ultimate origin of a theory of justice and ethics. Modern theories, according to Taylor, almost on the whole followed the Platonic impulse in adopting the revisionist outlook. The capacity to question existing practices has been the central concern for most of them.[100] As is noticeable, in Plato Taylor finds both an instructive case about how a substantive vision may be preserved together with a revisionist, critical perspective, and an early, negative example of how civic humanism is dismissed. Plato discounts the life of the citizen and activities in the *polis*, and hence internal goods, as "mere appearances, simulacra." Thus, his critical-revisionist attitude led him to underestimate the internal goods of the common practices of citizens. An analogue to this can again be followed in modern affirmations of ordinary life somewhat at the expense of citizen life. Still, Taylor makes it explicit that his appreciation of the depth of modern citizen life is not as low as MacIntyre's.

Taylor's discussion about the difference between Plato and Aristotle reveals another divergence between him and MacIntyre. In fact, with respect to the question of the good and the virtues, Taylor is quite different from MacIntyre. Taylor thinks that our moral experience and understanding proceeds between two poles. On one side are the goods that we get acquainted with "by being brought up in certain practices, to which they are internal." On the other side, however, are transcendent goods, goods that "transcend all our practices, such that we are capable of transforming or even repudiating some practices in the name of these goods." And then Taylor's disarming example comes: "So the prophets

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[100] One can observe, according to Taylor, a contemporary manifestation of this contrast between Plato and Aristotle in the case of Dworkin versus Walzer.

of Israel could radically downgrade some of the hitherto accepted ritual and tell the people in God's name that … they should rather come with a pure heart before God."[101]

I think Taylor's affirmation both of internal goods and transcendent ones signifies an important variation from MacIntyre, who is much more forceful in construing all goods as internal. By recognizing an equal place to transcendent goods Taylor makes room for revisionist, critical ethico-politics. Transcendent here means transcending our practices, not transcending "the things of this world." Only some goods belong to this category, and among them Taylor mentions also the modern idea of disengaged freedom. In this way Taylor is recognizing the significance of modern (procedural) ethical theories, which are based upon a notion of (transcendent) good, though they remain inarticulate about this. The difficult task is to reconcile the revisionist and comprehensive attitudes and to give due recognition to both types of goods. To mistake revisionism for proceduralism, as in the case of Habermas, in the name of a critical and universalist attitude, and at the expense of internal goods with their concrete context of practices, in Taylor's view, is one extreme here and unfit to the task at hand. But to reject revisionism and the place of transcendent goods in order to counter the inadequacies of abstract procedural rationality is the other extreme, of which Taylor cites Oakeshott as an example. Reconciliation is a hard task here, because Taylor recognizes also the possibility and in fact the reality of conflict between the two types of the good. Hence, as he puts it, "There is no a priori way to resolve this; we have to work it out case by case."

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[101] Charles Taylor, "The Motivation behind a Procedural Ethics", p. 355.

5.11. The Right and the Good

Does such rehabilitation of the good necessitate or require denial of any distinction between questions of rightness and concern with the good? Does Taylor deny or refute the moral point of view? Does his insistence on the need for re-stating ethics of the right in terms of the good amount to what Rasmussen and Uyl criticizes as 'equinormativity,'[102] that is, indifference to any categorical distinction between different types of norms by seeing all values under the same heading, as species of a genus?

Axel Honneth, for instance, criticizes his mentor Habermas's theory of discourse ethics due to the gap it opens and cannot then manage to close between transcendental pragmatics and ordinary life praxis, a gap prone to creating motivational frailties in moral agents. But, on the other hand, he detects as a general weakness some unwillingness on the part of the hermeneutic thinkers to specify the particular force of moral demands or the distinctive role of moral principles in adjudicating moral-political disagreements. Again, the priorities are different. The Habermasian perspective is ultimately wedded to an epistemological or rational epistemological concern with the validity claims of norms, or norms of action, conceived on an analogy with the validity claims of theoretical statements, that is, an analogy between the rightness of norms and the truth of propositions.[103] Hermeneutic thinkers, on the other hand, are concerned with the ontological underpinnings of practical reason and, despite Habermas's efforts not to conflate theoretical with practical reason, find the latter's perspective (and those similar to it) as still too engrossed by the epistemological bent of modern civilization.

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[102] Douglas B. Rasmussen and Douglas J. Den Uyl, *Norms of Liberty: A Perfectionist Basis for Non-Perfectionist Politics* (Penn State Press, 2005), p. 34.

[103] Jurgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (MIT Press, 1990), pp. 196-197.

Now, all those who recognize some priority or weight for the good grapple with this range of issues. But, as it seems to me, Taylor, and philosophers leaning toward similar positions, like Ricoeur, for instance, would not abstain from acknowledging some distinction between the right and the good. In fact, this is just what they are doing in some ways. They recognize a certain distinctive place for the norm as an inevitable consequence of modernity, or modern ethico-political or maybe also juridical imaginary and horizon. Questions of rightness, the 'moral point of view,' or what Habermasians call 'context-transcending validity,' whichever name one chooses, have earned a distinctive place of its own in modernity. Political modernity, at least, is almost impossible to make sense of without some such recognition of the sublimity of the norm and the vitality of its institutionalization in terms of rights and entitlements, as well as morally right conduct and treatment. But the reason behind such acknowledgement is not historico-prudential alone; they articulate their own reasons for it. However, Taylor and Ricoeur are also concerned with the wider context within which the norm acquires its sublimity and meaning. They don't just leave it as separate, but want to see its mode of relation to the good in a better light. They inquire into the mode of relation between the right and the good. Ricoeur gives expression to this concern in a concise formula: "the wish for a fulfilled life in and with others in just institutions." He continues:

> Justice, for this reading, is an integral part of the wish to live well. In other words, the wish to live in just institutions arises from the same level of morality as do the desire for personal fulfillment and the reciprocity of friendship. The just is first an object of desire, of a lack, of a wish. It begins as a wish before it is an imperative.[104]

What I see here is a complex mediation between layers of moral life and experience. The right and the good are affirmed as part of a single ethical vision, as co-structuring the ethical life. Therefore, the mode of relation between the right and the good may be called a relation of structuration. This is also close to what Taylor calls the strategy of comprehension, or the comprehending strategy. Using the term 'ethical life' should also

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[104] Paul Ricoeur, *The Just* (The University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. xv.

reveal to us the general Hegelian background here, especially in Taylor's case. Hegel is well-known in his endeavors to integrate Kantian morality, or the right, into his vision of *Sittlickheit*, and, tellingly, names the work in which he elaborates on such a vision of integration as 'sublation' *The Philosophy of Right*. Here the rightful place of the right is recognized, yet the ontological primacy and teleology of the good is retained.

What is aimed at here is not the rejection of disengaged freedom or of what is usually called the 'moral point of view' above and beyond substantive ethical particularities. Taylor does not see any particular merit in a wholesale displacement of morality, or ethics of right or rules. On the contrary, he recognizes the rightful place of the moral in the general canvas of ethics, even to the point of acknowledging its priority in certain contexts and situations. But he demands that its wider habitat be acknowledged. The right is not accorded total autonomy here, because Taylor does not accept any a priori limitation on the use of practical reason in favor of a moral principle, or in favor of the right. Such a limitation would lead us to another version of what he calls single-principle ethics, "squeezing stone for blood," which is impoverishing given the multiple goods we affirm and our attempts to attain at least partial reconciliation among those goods throughout our lives. It also seems at variance with the tragic facets of life, that is, the necessity of making tragic choices at some points, which is certainly not the same, at least not always, as yielding to a single principle.

Therefore, part of the reason for Taylor's position in this matter derives from his understanding of practical reasoning and ethical pragmatics. When the right or the moral point of view presides over aretaic concerns, over concerns for excellence or for the good, or for eudaimonistic consummation, is a case-sensitive issue. The working of practical reason is not from the ground up; it comprises a phronetic element, a hermeneutic sensitivity, and, as emphasized above, a prior implicit grasp of the good, even when it is giving priority to the right in a particular case. This is why Taylor calls this model of practical reasoning 'ad hominem' as opposed to the 'apodictic' model of practical

reasoning, which is modeled on the mode of argumentation or reasoning that reigns in the natural sciences.[105]

Yet another reason is the ontological primacy he accords to the good in ethics. Taylor sees even the right or the moral point of view with all its implications ultimately as a manifestation and affirmation of certain goods or a certain conception of the good. He suggests seeing what is implied by the right as a characteristically modern example of a 'hypergood,' a good providing the point and purpose of various life goods. What is specified as the moral domain and the concerns and values affirmed particularly in that domain are just another expression of the modern identity, or another good incorporated into modern identity as a constituent dimension; and, hence, his endorsement of the idea of subsuming the right under the good. If not articulated in terms of the good, the categorical or first-order importance of the right, or what are sometimes called the meta-norms of liberalism, can hardly be grounded or entirely made sense of. This is also a call for the articulation of the deeper motives behind according such supreme importance to the right.

Behind the powerful hold in modern culture of the apodictic model of practical reason and procedural ethics in general, Taylor finds one of the most important factors to be the false identification of the demands of critical morality with procedural rationality. Because substantive moralities are already too tainted with the prevailing order and norms, any critical perspective on society should assume a procedural mode of reasoning, or at least should start from a standpoint that is under the least possible influence from prevailing notions of the good. Implicit in such an understanding is also a view of the ethical, as distinct from the moral, as what is merely habitual or purely empirical or given. Against this, Taylor tries to show the possibility of critique even on the basis of a substantive ethics of the good. Plato does this, according to him, criticizing all the 'internal goods' of the polis from the standpoint of an ethics of the good. This Taylor also calls 'transcendent goods,' as

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[105] Charles Taylor, "Explanation and Practical Reason" in his *Philosophical Arguments* (Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 34-60.

opposed to internal goods. In a way he tries to show that criticism is not the exclusive property of procedural ethics or the moral use of practical reason. In addition to all this, Taylor is of the opinion that an ethics of the good affirmed in this way is closer to the motivational depths of ethical agency and experience. Circumscribing a special domain of the moral seems wanting in this regard.

Admittedly, this way of modulating the good and the right might sometimes seem as ultimately aporetic; that is, unable to go beyond a certain aporetics of the good and the right. Yet, they seek to make a virtue out of this tinge of aporetics. Taylor presents this as an inevitable outcome of the plurality of goods we have to affirm. We cannot squeeze the realm of the goods so as to subject them to a single-principle ethics. The very plurality of the goods our form of life incorporates is resistant to such subjection. When it happens, it is only at the cost of a great impoverishment in our ethical self-understanding and motivation. But this does not mean that there is no ranking or priority among the goods an individual or group of individuals may embrace. On the contrary, some goods are much stronger in their hold on us: strong values or hyper goods. So, some are stronger, or might have priority over others. Moreover, one might attain some reconciliation among a variety of goods one pursues during one's course of life. But that is all without an a priori constraint on the use of practical reason; a constraint in favor of a single principle over all others. This is also a way of acknowledging the tragic possibilities of life. But the tragedy does not stem from the nature of the goods themselves, as if the goods are tragic by their very ontology. It is rather because of the limitations of man or human finitude.

CONCLUSION:

TOWARD A RECONCILIATION OF VIRTUE AND FREEDOM

Every scholarly writing, and therefore as a sub-genre every dissertation, opens up a reflective field that bears witness to some tension between freedom and virtue in the practice of writing. One is free to trace and retrace various theoretical paths, proceed along several different routes to the subject matter, and follow the call of curiosity to the end. But, on the other hand, to avoid taking too much license and losing the point, such freedom must be reasonably constrained by some general standards of excellence, regard for conventions, and respect for exemplars. To further complicate the matter, one could exchange the roles here and say that excellence in writing requires one to cover all the relevant materials, to search for all the sources on the subject matter, and freedom is the ability or right to retreat from this; a complexity attesting to the tensional affiliation between freedom and virtue. In either construal, writing appears to be an experience of participation in an emergent and anticipated achievement. Writing cannot be seen in the register of radical choice, pure self-determination, or negative freedom. Pondering now on what I have experientially learned from my practice of writing I would say that that elusive thing we call freedom seems to me truly akin to "a strange process in which we participate,"[1] a process charged with aretaic tests and possibilities leading to ethical self-transformation.

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[1] William Connolly, "Belief, Spirituality, and Time" in M. Warner, J. Vanantwerpen, C. Calhoun (eds.), *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age* (Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 135.

Clearly, this is a participatory, or situated, understanding of freedom. But what does such a characterization of freedom more specifically imply? Freedom is not the sort of thing we can capture in full; it is not a ready-made possession amenable to appropriation. Freedom is an achievement, and not once and for all, but as a continuous quest in a space of concerns. In Wellmer's words, freedom "is not the sort of thing that could ever be realized in a definitive or perfect sense."[2] But if this is true, then it allows us to understand freedom in terms of more or less, or in terms of better/richer or weaker/impoverished, thereby giving an ethical inflection to our conception of freedom.

Now, certainly not everyone would take freedom in this way. In fact, in contemporary political philosophy there have been at least two kinds of attempt to establish a non-moral or, at least, a less moral conception of freedom. One was moved by the perceived need to render freedom amenable or more amenable to operationalization and objective analysis. This was motivated by a political scientific interest during the post-war period, but also by the intention of purifying the concept of freedom of ideological distortion during the Cold War period.[3] But in more recent years it reappeared with an egalitarian intent and within a justice-theoretic framework. Now in this latter case freedom is interpreted in a way that renders it conceptually purified so as to obtain a unit of socio-economic comparison, analysis, and critique. This unit is called "distributive freedom."[4]

The second attempt was similarly motivated by an interest in purifying or, more accurately put, distinguishing the concept of freedom from other weighty concepts like equality, fraternity, and solidarity. This finds its best expression in Berlin, when he says, "Everything is what it is, liberty is liberty, not equality or fairness or justice or culture, or

[2] Albrecht Wellmer, "Models of Freedom in the Modern World", in Michael Kelly (ed.) *Hermeneutics and Critical Theory in Ethics and Politics* (MIT Press, 1990), p. 250.

[3] William Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse* (Princeton University Press, 1993[1974])], pp. 140-75.

[4] Katrin Flikschuh, *Freedom* (Polity Press, 2007), pp. 89-113.

human happiness or a quiet conscience."[5] Berlin, too, as we know, was writing in order to counteract what he had seen as the ideological distortion of freedom during the Cold War.

As far as I can see none of these understandings of freedom sufficiently attend to the situated character of our freedom, which is so rigorously delineated by MacIntyre and Taylor.[6] How freedom takes shape as a self-transformative process in concrete practices and in our life-worldly encounters does not find any place in these conceptions. Apart from the question of their conceptual and theoretical viability, however, from the perspective of these conceptions the evaluative spectrum mentioned above loses much of its import. The ethical quality of freedom is lost from view or seriously strained; more specifically for my purposes, freedom so construed is not virtue-evaluable. In other words, at this level freedom does not join hands with virtue.

These comments are not meant to criticize negative freedom as such. In fact, negative freedoms have a relatively well-established place in modern political settings as rights and entitlements. But although indispensable as formal protective shields, rights risk amounting only to "substanceless virtuality of open options"[7] or sliding into vested rights. As Dallmayr makes clear, "Typically, rights are initially acquired through struggle; yet, once social conditions stabilize or solidify, there is a subtle transition from rights to 'vested

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[5] Isaiah Berlin, *Four Concepts of Liberty* (Oxford University Press, 1971[1958]), p. 125.

[6] Some political philosophers, most notable Richard Flathman, broadly following the lead of Berlin try to argue for a "situated negative freedom", but here the notion (situated) is given a quite weakened import. See R. Flathman, *The Philosophy and Politics of Freedom* (Chicago University Press, 1987). For a comparison of weak and strong conceptions of the life-world see Fred Dallmayr, "Life-world: Variations on a Theme", in S.K. White (ed.), *Life-World and Politics: Between Modernity and Postmodernity* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), pp.25-65.

[7] Alessandro Ferrara, *Modernity and Authenticity: A Study of the Social and Ethical Thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (SUNY Press, 1993), p. 61.

rights' – commonly to the detriment of the underprivileged or outcasts of society."[8] This means that rights, too, need to be opened to ethical evaluation.

At the level of positive freedom in the sense of autonomy or self-determination our conception of freedom starts entering an aretaic domain and taking on the quality of an ethical achievement. At this level freedom covers also the ability to cope with internal impediments and centers on the quality of our motivation. But in a philosophical context where the classical idea of subjectivity is destabilized in various ways even the notion of positive freedom and autonomy requires rethinking.[9] Also, as regards the question of the virtues, even autonomy does not fully capture the complex fabric of the virtues. Self-determination or autonomy cannot exhaustively define our ethical relations and being. Our relations to our significant others and those who, in MacIntyre's words, "contingency and chance put in our care" do not neatly fit into the language of self-legislation. And sometimes "excellence in being *for* the good"[10] requires acknowledgment of ethical demands on us that an autonomist understanding of freedom would only obscure.[11]

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[8] Fred Dallmayr, *The Other Heidegger* (Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 129.

[9] As Axel Honneth makes clear "in contrast to the classical ideal of autonomy, a systematic weakening has to follow on all three levels. The classical goal of need transparency must be replaced by the ability to articulate in language. The idea of biographical consistency should be replaced by the notion of a narrative coherence of life. Finally, the idea of a principled orientation should be supplemented by the criterion of moral sensitivity to context"; see his "Decentered Autonomy: the Subject after the Fall", in L. Langddorf, S.H. Watson, K. A. Smith (eds.) *Reinterpreting the Political: Continental Philosophy and Political Theory* (SUNY Press, 1998), p. 204.

[10] Robert Merrihew adams *A Theory of Virtue Excellence in Being* for *the Good* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

[11] This is why L. Hatab says at one point that "virtue ... also disrupts the modern ideal of autonomy, strictly construed"; *Ethics and Finitude: Heideggerian Contributions to Moral Philosophy* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), p. 118. There has been several recent attempts to articulate a richer conception of autonomy, like the one developed by M. Cooke whose conception integrates Taylor's notion of 'strong evaluation' to the definition of autonomy; see Maeve Cooke, *Re-Presenting the Good Society* (MIT Press, 2006), pp. 133-38. On the other hand, S.K. White argues, rightly in my view, that despite recent moves to "a more sophisticated picture of the autonomous self of liberalism" incorporating into their accounts the necessity of cultural or semantic resources for the fruition and practice of autonomy, these (his case is W. Kymlicka) are still couched

But this last point takes us also to a new understanding of the virtues as well. If what is said about autonomy is true, then an agent-centered virtue-ethical perspective would fall short of accounting for the kind of virtues or virtuous responses which are not primarily directed to agent-flourishing. Some of the virtues and virtuous responses are target-centered or devoted to the "recipient-dimension of moral order,"[12] though the virtues are still the virtues of the virtuous agent. Think of MacIntyre's "just generosity" or Taylor's *agapic* affirmation of the human (bearing also upon his reading of the post-axial revolution in conceptions of the good going beyond mere human flourishing). These are modes of ethical acknowledgment or affirmation the bases of which go beyond the strict boundaries of agent-flourishing, but calling for an ethic of cultivation and self-transformation. It should immediately be noted, however, that even at this level of the matter what is entailed is not necessarily the kinds of action which are sometimes called 'supererogatory.' The networks of receiving and giving described by MacIntyre are not necessarily networks of supererogation. On the contrary, just generosity and virtuous responsiveness are displayed in the warp and woof of daily or ordinary life.

The path toward a possible reconciliation between freedom and virtue thus leads us beyond our dominant understandings of virtue as well as freedom, beyond agent-flourishing and autonomy, or, more accurately, beyond their subject-centered and anthropocentric conceptions. But this does not leave us under the mandate of heteronomy. On the contrary, ethical demands calling for virtuous responses constitute the very field in

in instrumental terms, missing our more engaged or embedded relation to our semantic background; see his "Weak Ontology: Genealogy and Critical Issues", *The Hedgehog Review* 7.2 Summer (2005).

[12] It has in the past been a standard criticism against virtue ethics that its eudaimonistic concern involves an element of egoism. This criticism has been countered in various successful ways, but accentuating what is called the target-centered dimension of virtue ethics has been much more helpful in my view. For a target-centered perspective, see Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (Oxford University Press, 2003). The phrase "recipient dimension of moral order" belongs to Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton University Press, 2008).

which we can see our ethical possibilities. In Murdoch's words, "The exercise of our freedom is a small piecemeal business which goes on all the time."[13] Freedom works through limiting conditions, but these very conditions are full of possibilities for the perfection or enrichment of freedom, because they give freedom different possibilities of expression. Freedom perfects itself and takes on an ethical quality in situations, relations and encounters putting demands on us, or awaiting ethical responses from us. Freedom acquires its ethical quality against an arteaic depth opened up in our worldly engagements. By aretaic depth I am alluding here also to Taylor's phenomenological notion of "moral space," but giving it a virtue-ethical inflection.

Have we reached a point of reconciliation, then? Reconciliation[14] does not amount to a state of perfect harmony, but to a process of transformation which cannot clear away every trace of negativity. Some tension or tensional affiliation will remain between virtue and freedom, constituting the highway, not of despair hopefully, but of human maturation or Bildung. In other words, there seem to be paths to some reconciliation between freedom and virtue as we have seen throughout this study. But, in general, their relation will remain the kind that some philosophers call 'differential entwinement,' sustaining the ethical platform of any society between richer and poorer forms of freedom.

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[13] Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (Routledge, 2004 [1970]), p. 36. These words echo also Gadamer's remarks that being-ethical is not in our discretion, we are always already ethical.

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