Religion and the Sciences

Opportunities and Challenges

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7. Some Psychological Aspects of Religious Ethics

Virtue and Motivation

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Introduction

Similar to most every other ethical system, "religious ethics"[1] has a tendency to emphasize the behavioral aspects of being ethical and the rules that govern those behaviors. Many people believe that a specifically religious ethics has a double advantage over what might be called humanistic ethics. The first appears to be a solid foundation for the validity of its rules or laws, which are said to be anchored on a supernatural or transcendent plain. The second seems to represent the ultimate motivational impetus for following the rules,

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[1] Although the paradigm may be extrapolated to other religions, I am focusing here on the Christian approach to ethics, especially as it is practiced in the Catholic context.

which is believed to take place in the afterlife. Reward and punishment have no greater meaning than the promise (or threat) of eternity.

However, an individual's attention is not always focused on the afterlife. The immediacy of the moment can tempt one to take a more lax attitude toward rules or laws, even when they are said to be backed up by divine authority. Therefore, it becomes important to reinforce the weight of moral stipulations in order to ward off momentary temptations. Perhaps the most effective way of doing that is to load the violation of rules and laws with generous portions of guilt. The association of guilt with a disrespect for ethical norms invests them with an authority all their own.

Behavioral norms understood to possess their own authority can be made to function independently. Some of them may even become absolutes. The impression is created that norms themselves are sufficient for constructing and maintaining an entire ethical system, something that can be called "normative ethics." Many people believe that if one fulfills their obligations and violates no prohibitions their lives are ethically "in order." In other words, normative ethics can, and unfortunately frequently does, function with little or no attention being given to the ends or goals of ethical living.

This is not to say that ends or goals are not considered at all. At minimum, doing a good thing for bad reasons is generally considered to be ethically corrupt.[2] And although good reasons for doing whatever (good) one does are usually presumed, those reasons may be nothing more than a slavish following of unquestioned norms. The point here is that normative ethics emphasizes the duty to follow laws and rules to such an extent that it can easily lose sight of the very meaning of ethical living.

Reversing the Emphasis

I expect that one of the reasons for favoring normative ethics is the fear of falling into utilitarianism or consequentialism. The stereotypes that are routinely invoked to describe these approaches generally revolve around the idea that in any alternative approach to ethical reasoning one is concerned "only" or "merely" with the outcome of given behaviors. Such an approach is accused of having no respect for "principles," especially those that are considered "inviolable." In this case, the emphasis only makes a lateral move from norms to principles. This neatly avoids the question about how particular circumstances may affect the way in which we apply norms. One can claim to be respecting principles even when the outcome of one's behavior appears to violate a norm. A good example might be the so-called "principle of totality" that allows mutilation of the human body for the sake of preserving life.

Another alternative to normative ethics that has frequently been put forward is virtue ethics. If "virtue is its own reward," then seeking to live a virtuous life may motivate a person without the need for guilt or punishment. At first sight, virtue ethics seems to be a potential candidate to replace the behavior-oriented, normative system with a goal-oriented approach. We can sketch this with the following table. Note that the statements are exactly the same but are rendered in reverse order in the opposite pane.

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[2] Classical example: publically giving alms to the poor in order to gain esteem (see Aquinas: I-II, 19, 7, ad 2).

Normative Approach	Goal-Oriented Approach
Persons evaluate and then choose to perform (or omit) actions, within given sets of circumstances that are historically and culturally contextual	Because they are motivated to achieve or maintain certain states of affairs (ends or goals) that reflect their view of themselves and their world
because they are motivated to achieve or maintain certain states of affairs (ends or goals) that reflect their view of themselves and their world	persons evaluate and then choose to perform (or omit) actions, within given sets of circumstances that are historically and culturally contextual

The challenge of fitting virtue ethics into a goal-oriented approach is whether a particular rendition of virtue thinking is really considering ends to be sought or is still caught up in the quandary about determining "what is the virtuous thing to do?"[3] It is entirely possible that an approach calling itself virtue ethics remains largely concerned with behavior, enumerating lists of virtuous activities or, as Alisdair MacIntyre (2007: 175) calls them, "practices."[4]

If virtue ethics is going to function as a genuine goal-oriented approach, then it needs to be understood as first influencing motivation, identifying goals to be achieved, and then subsequently guiding a choice of behavior. This in no way diminishes the importance of choosing appropriate behaviors, but it does more closely reflect the way that human persons actually make ethical decisions.
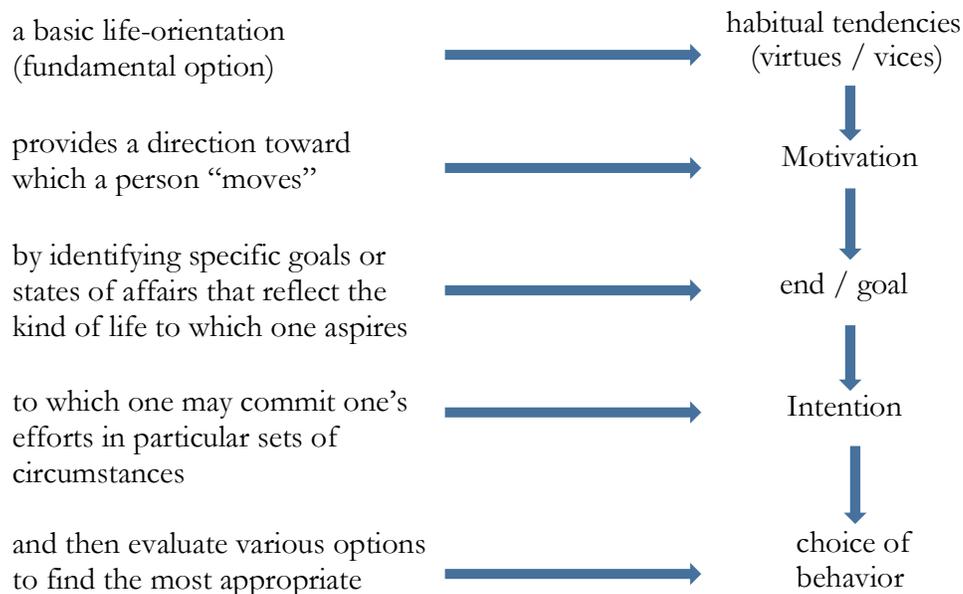
Persons do not perform voluntary actions without being motivated. We act (or omit acting) because we have a reason for doing so. In many ways, the proper question to ask oneself in an ethical situation is not, "what should I do?" but rather, "what is it that I want to accomplish here?" In order to understand this better and to provide a schema for further elaboration, consider Figure 1 on the next page.

Admittedly, most people are not consciously aware of what they may want to accomplish in a given ethical situation. They appear to rely very much on what they might call a "gut feeling," doing what they believe is "the right thing to do." The good news here is that if persons have built up and maintained good habitual tendencies during their life, they may have the edge of being able to make rapid and consistent decisions about the direction in which they wish to move. These habitual tendencies are sometimes referred to as character traits, or in ethical language, virtues (or vices).

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[3] Since Alisdair MacIntyre first published his *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, a huge amount of literature has been published on the topic of virtue ethics. Surveying that literature is an enormous task, the results of which could never fit into the parameters of the present essay.

[4] Unfortunately, in the subsequent works of MacIntyre (1988, 1990, 1994), it appears that MacIntyre had not escaped from the behavioral paradigm.

Figure 1. The Process of Ethical Decision-Making

a basic life-orientation (fundamental option)	→	habitual tendencies (virtues / vices)
		↓
provides a direction toward which a person "moves"	→	Motivation
		↓
by identifying specific goals or states of affairs that reflect the kind of life to which one aspires	→	end / goal
		↓
to which one may commit one's efforts in particular sets of circumstances	→	Intention
		↓
and then evaluate various options to find the most appropriate	→	choice of behavior

The bad news is that ethical situations are frequently, if not most of the time, complex, with the result that it may be hard to identify precisely what it might be that one wants to accomplish. Let me take the relatively innocuous situation of a parent with their child about two or three years old, accompanied by one of the in-laws of the parent, all of whom are in a public place where the parent is attempting to accomplish an important task, like negotiating a banking transaction or finalizing the travel plans for the visiting in-law to return home. For some reason, the child begins to cry.

If you were to ask an intelligent, widely experienced expert such as a psychotherapist who has no ties to any of the parties in this situation, you might get the response that most children who cry are signaling some kind of need and that of all the involved parties the small child is certainly the most vulnerable and the least equipped to deal with needful situations. Meanwhile, back in the real world there is the adult parent who is caught between the care for their child, the interfamilial dynamics of dealing with in-laws, the need to accomplish an important task, and perhaps even a concern for the public performance that is taking place.

Behind, or within, all of this complexity there is the familial and intergenerational learning to which the parent has been exposed. What is the parent "bringing" to the situation? What is the relationship not only with the child but also with the in-law? How pressing is the task to be accomplished? What is the timeframe within which all this is taking place? There are myriad circumstances that can influence not merely the precise response given to the situation but more importantly how the very situation is being comprehended and evaluated.

A common tendency here is to think of "doing something," performing a behavior, like trying to make the child stop crying, asking the in-law to take charge of the child, or simply

ignoring the child and carrying on with the business at hand. I would propose, however, that a more balanced approach would be to (re-)think what one is attempting to accomplish. What is the end toward which one is moving?

An end is not an activity or a thing. It is a state of affairs that one is motivated to bring about or to maintain. In this case, the end of the parent accompanied by the child and the in-law originally was to accomplish a particular task. That end was likely to have been the goal of a virtuous tendency that moved the person to achieve a beneficial state of affairs.

The crying child, however, has disturbed the motivation toward that goal and the parent can either respond with the first thing that comes to mind – performing a behavior – or they could again ask themselves what it is that they want to accomplish. Something has intervened in the original plan and one's priorities may need to be rearranged. In considering a new set of goals, one refers back to their habitual tendencies and attempts to identify which goals may or may not be virtuous.

Understood as a state of affairs, an end or goal can be judged to be virtuous or vicious. These are not categories that one applies directly to activities (behaviors) because the very same behavior – again, in the case under consideration, carrying out a banking or traveling arrangement – may be judged "virtuous" in one set of circumstances, while a change of circumstances may very well alter one's judgment about what is going on. If the parent identifies the child's cry as signaling distress and the parent simultaneously knows that the in-law at hand is not an apt person to take charge of the situation, simply ignoring the child and carrying on with their original plan may no longer be a virtuous thing to do.

The Dynamics of the Ethical Decision-Making Process

Looking again at Figure 1, it seems evident that the process of ethical decision-making is much more complex than most people think. To begin, a person may be motivated by more than just character traits. Abraham Maslow (59-104) suggested that needs are the primary drivers of motivation: physiological needs, safety and security, love and belonging, self-esteem, and growth needs. While this scheme has been superseded by later work, it still offers a meaningful perspective. Nathan Tierney describes what he refers to as the "admired-idealized self-object" as something desirable that induces ethical motivation. One of the advantages of this approach is that it takes account of the social environment within which persons are formed and live. Understanding virtue as a source of motivation is an ancient philosophical concept that is frequently traced back to Aristotle.[5] However, the virtues he suggested were aimed at describing the "excellence" of living like a free, male, educated citizen of the city-state, a position hardly said to be open to the whole of humankind.

I return to the issue of elaborating virtues below. The point here is that human persons must be motivated to perform voluntary activities. The first of these concerns the identification of a particular state of affairs that one is attempting to accomplish. This is what

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[5] Different Aristotelian sources and translations render different lists ranging between ten and twenty virtues. Although some of these are "standard," such as kindness and generosity, others might sound strange to contemporary ears, such as magnanimity (nobleness) and shame; while still others remain rather controversial e.g., is friendship really a virtue?

is identified as an end, a potential goal toward which one is willing to expend time, resources, and effort to achieve.

Identifying the end of a voluntary activity should not be confused either with mere consequences or with how one feels about what might have to be done to accomplish that end. The consequences of human activity are, of course, important. However, they can only be judged against a much larger picture that includes an appreciation for the end being accomplished. On the basis of that judgment, we may have to sacrifice certain ends because the "cost" of bringing them about would be too high. Many people, including the American bishops, judged the use of nuclear weapons according to such a standard. On the other hand, some consequences may need to be accepted or tolerated because the alternative to causing them would be far worse. Removing a person's limb to prevent that person's death may be regrettable but justifiable.

The voluntary act by which one commits oneself to an end is called intention.[6] Intention does not signify the actual achievement of an end or goal, but merely the commitment to that achievement. Before one can accomplish an end one must make a second decision about which form of activity or omission would constitute an appropriate manner of acting. Note that the judgment about appropriateness is directly related to the (realization of an) end and cannot be made without a knowledge of the end – the aimed at state of affairs – that is to be accomplished. Some activities, such as demanding that persons give up a certain amount of their income may be inappropriate when the agent making such demands is a criminal, but it may very well be an appropriate measure for a government collecting justifiable taxes.

Behaviors are chosen in function of an end to which one has already made a commitment. Thus they can only be evaluated on that basis. Some behaviors, such as the amputation of a limb mentioned above contain elements that we would prefer to avoid if the circumstances were different. Things that we would rather avoid are referred to as "evil" in an ethical context. However, such evils may be justified when one considers the human voluntary activity as a whole. As long as those evils are kept to a minimum and do not contradict the end being accomplished, they are absorbed in the entire ethical event.

Understanding Virtues

Ask a person with a rudimentary knowledge of Western philosophy what the virtues are and chances are that the first answer will be "prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude," the so-called "cardinal" virtues that "hinge" over the whole of moral life. Ask a Catholic scholar about the virtues and, besides (and usually preceding) the cardinal virtues, you will hear about the theological virtues, faith, hope and charity, taken not from the gospels but from the Pauline literature (1 Corinthians 13:13) – which clearly gives charity precedence over the other two, a detail that seems to have been lost in tradition. The invocation of the

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[6] I am fully aware that my use of the word "intention" may be at odds with some more traditionalist renditions, in particular that of Anscombe. I am, in fact, following the thinking of Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*. In his treatise on the structure of the moral act, I-II, 1-21, he repeats over and over that the "object of the act of the will is the end." The technical term that he uses for this act of the will is intention (see question 12; see also, Selling: 373-76).

theological virtues raises more issues than it solves, for it brings forth the nearly unanswerable question concerning the claim that such virtues are "infused" – namely, that God gives these virtues to persons through some gratuitous act (of grace). This initial conundrum is followed by the equally vexing question about whether one can enjoy the cardinal virtues without first possessing the theological virtues. However one answers this question, one is bound to be confronted with another Pauline dictum about gentiles, who appear to be righteous despite their ignorance of "the law" (Romans 2:13-13), and this begins the question about infusion all over again.[7]

Scholars who look to Thomas Aquinas to answer these questions usually come away with answers that seem to respond to their own expectations but deliver precious little for pastoral practice, i.e., practical theological ethics.[8] Evidence for this is not hard to mount. I have rarely, if ever, seen a Thomistic scholar discuss the virtue of vengeance (*Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 108) or describe how one develops the habit of martyrdom (q. 124). Nor is there much discourse about what Aquinas clearly tells us are vices rather than virtues, namely irony (113), fearlessness (126), daring (127), ambition (131), and curiosity (167).

The long and short of this is that the classical approach to virtue and the concomitant efforts to build a "virtue ethics" have not gone very far. One of the reasons for this is that virtues point to attitudes, tendencies or dispositions, not the easily describable, concrete activity that one finds in normative (behavioral) ethics. One can be just, courageous, or moderate in doing contrary things in different sets of circumstances. While avoiding any form of physical force or harm might be considered "just" in most interpersonal relationships, exactly the opposite might be considered "just" in meting out punishment to criminals.

Another difficulty is that "virtue theory" is fraught with several presumptions that are rarely questioned. The notion that a virtue is a "mean between two extremes" is so completely textbook that no one seems to doubt it. The idea that there is a difference

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[7] My own opinion about certain virtues being "infused" simply points to the realization that one cannot acquire these particular virtues on one's own. They must be "given" to a person from an outside source. In the Catholic tradition, which is sacramental and heavily biased toward the concept of mediation, this seems to fit neatly into the same mold.

[8] After treating the virtues in general (questions 49-54) and in particular (questions 55-70) in *Summa Theologiae* I-II, the II-II is entirely taken up with the discussion of virtue (questions 1-170) and the expectations of persons occupying a particular state in life (questions 171-89). After discussing the theological virtues (1-46), he divides the cardinal virtues into the intellectual virtues (prudence and its parts, 47-56) and moral virtues (57-170). The specific moral virtues he names are found in three categories:

- *Justice* (57-80) is further subdivided into religion (81-100), piety (101), observance (102), giving honor (103), obedience (104-5), gratitude (106-7), vengeance (108), truth (109-113), affability (114-16), liberality (117-19), and *epikeia* (120);

- *Fortitude* (123) is further subdivided into martyrdom (124), magnanimity (129), magnificence (134), patience (136), and perseverance (137);

- *Temperance* (141-43) is further subdivided into spiritual beauty (145), abstinence (146), sobriety (149), chastity (151), virginity (152), continence (155), clemency (156), meekness (157), modesty (160), humility (161), and studiousness (166).

between "ordinary" (?) virtue and virtue that is "perfected by charity" remains a mystery, at least in my mind. Then there is the lesser-known suggestion that a virtuous person must necessarily possess all the virtues.[9] I had nearly forgotten about this until I ran across what I think is its ultimate nemesis.

Owen Flanagan writes,

> . . . a theory that requires that the morally excellent person possess *every* virtue violates [the principle of minimal psychological realism] for two reasons. First, there is no determinate list that includes all the virtues, and thus no clear meaning can be ascribed to the idea of possessing *every* one. Second, insofar as we can list many of the qualities that we count as virtues, the idea of any individual possessing all of them is incoherent. This is because some of the qualities on the list are inconsistent with one another and would, so to speak, cancel one another out. For example, vivaciousness, forthrightness, and physical courage are virtues. But so are serenity, tactfulness, and pacifism. Different virtuous persons can possess the virtues in either subset. But the notion of one human individual possessing all the virtues in both subsets is not merely undesirable, it is impossible (33).[10]

As far as the "indeterminate" list of virtues is concerned, I believe that the empirical evidence is sufficient to substantiate the point. For the past five years or so I have made a hobby of collecting what other people call virtues. My list has grown to more than 220 different items that someone, somewhere thinks is a virtue. Clearly some (many) of these, like "toughness" or "safety," are highly suspect.

Regarding the notion that virtues cancel each other out, all one has to do is to compile a list as long as the one I have and be attentive to the incompatibilities. The results may be startling enough so that one could be tempted to abandon virtue theory completely.

A Nearly Forgotten Insight

As the second Vatican Council was coming to an end, a young German Jesuit scholastic studying theology in Leuven, Belgium published an article in the journal of his resident community that ultimately upset the entire discipline of moral theology. The significance of Peter Knauer's study remains almost unequaled to this day, although many seem to have missed his most important point. Between the French original and the English translation, the author went from an observation about "determining" good and evil to the insightful position that the principle of double effect presented clear evidence ("the hermeneutic function") that the moral theological tradition had found a way of dealing with evil that was

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[9] At least one more difficulty about virtue theory is the presumption that it is transcultural. My research into the field has revealed cultural influences that simply cannot be ignored. Consider, for instance, the notion of "punctuality" that might be lived out in Germany or in Italy.

[10] The "principle of minimal psychological realism," a key concept in Flanagan's book, states that "a normative conception which fails to meet certain standards of psychological realizability will fail to grip us, and in failing to grip us will fail to gain our attention, respect, and effort" (xx).

real, foreseen, and thus voluntarily,[11] if not intentionally, brought about – without there being any culpability ascribed to the person who initiated the moral event.[12]

In making his point, Knauer provided several examples of how the moral tradition had dealt with "evil" in human activity when moral agents were faced with genuine conflicts and dilemmas. In his survey of that tradition, however, he also provided a startling observation about virtues that appears to have gone unnoticed. He wrote,

> According to Aristotle, morally right behavior is a mean between two extremes which can be recognized as too much or too little. . . Thus, bravery is a mean between foolhardiness and cowardice. Aristotle declared that bravery appears more closely related to one of the two extremes, foolhardiness. This observation, which is made by Aristotle himself with some surprise, provides an opportunity for asking whether there is not also a name for right behavior which appears to lie closer to cowardice, the other false extreme. There is, in fact, prudence. It belongs inseparably with bravery (146).

Although Knauer referred to prudence[13] as "a name for right behavior" what he clearly indicates here is not an activity but a disposition, a virtue. On the following page, he goes on to name five more pairs of virtue, but then he simply moves on to another topic without further elaboration.

> Liberality accompanied by economy is distinguished from extravagance; economy is only avarice unless it is liberal. Progress is not a pure seeking of what is new but a preservation of what is good in the old; there is in fidelity to tradition only a spiritless severity unless it fosters the creation of the new. Zeal and discretion go together; otherwise zeal in reality becomes fanaticism, and instead of discretion there is mediocrity; "Be wise as the serpent and simple as the dove" (Matthew 10.16). Such a demand is not paradoxical but excludes slyness and stupidity together. Christian hope works out its salvation "in fear and trembling" (Philip. 2.12); one without the other is either presumption or despair. There are many other examples. This square is of universal applicability (147).

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[11] At the time, even Knauer would fall prey to the notion that such evil was produced "indirectly, was indirectly voluntary," or as McCormick would later write, "indirectly intended." All of this represents a fundamental flaw in understanding our own tradition. According to Aquinas, "indirect" has nothing to do with causes and effects (consequences) but simply refers to something being brought about by an omission rather than an action (I-II, 6, 3).

[12] Of course, the entire issue here revolves around a willingness to think about "evil" in a new way. To put it into my own terms, the word "evil" here is used in a descriptive (non- or pre-moral) way. It is to be distinguished from the word "bad," which describes one's intention (as virtuous or vicious) to the realization of an end, and from the word "wrong," which describes a fault (inappropriateness or disproportion) in the choice of the means to realize one's end. This topic, however, does not come within the scope of the present essay.

[13] Personally, I would prefer the label "caution" so as not to confuse this with the intellectual virtue of prudence.

What Knauer referred to as a square, I prefer to draw as a trapezoid (see Figure 2). For, the two virtues, e.g., bravery and caution, are located within the middle ground between the two extremes of foolhardiness and cowardice. That said, when one sketches the model, one can leave an empty space within the square or trapezoid that begs for commentary: what are these relationships about? It is clear that foolhardiness and cowardice are extremes, just as bravery and caution are ways of resolving the extremes, but what do they address? A moment's reflection brings forth the idea that this is the way in which persons face opposition or dangerous situations.

To put it in Aristotelian terms, finding the correct balance between bravery and caution is a way of dealing with a situation that speaks to the emotion of fear (cf. Hughes: 53-81). The two, complementary virtues are on a continuum, and the nature of one's intention, one's commitment to realize an end,[14] occurs somewhere between the two. As Knauer points out about Aristotle's insight, "pure" bravery, without any caution at all, would be nothing more than foolhardiness, while "pure" caution, without any bravery at all, would be cowardice.

Figure 2. The Virtuous Trapezoid
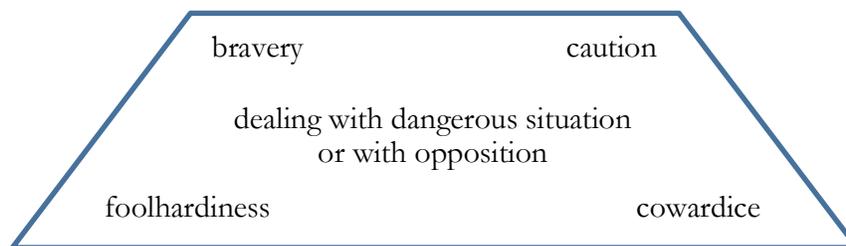
There is no single way to face danger because in order to determine the virtuosity of one's intention one needs to take detail into account: how much danger is there, does the danger threaten only myself or others as well, how well am I equipped to deal with it, what is the time frame within which one must deal with it, how are others going to understand or be affected by what I might do, what are the long-term as well as the short-term consequences of whatever I decide to do? None of these details can be known until one finds oneself in a concrete situation.

There is no simple recipe for determining the most appropriate course of action. Attempting to create such a recipe would lead to an endless accounting of detail: if the situation includes factors A, B, C, D, and K, an appropriate goal toward which to strive might be X; but if the factors include A, B, C, D, and M, then perhaps a very different response is called for. Simultaneously, attempting to bring about a state of affairs, X, may be virtuous in light of factor K (e.g., bravely resisting totalitarian forces on my own), but it may need to be different in light of factor M (e.g., cautiously remaining quiet while totalitarian forces threaten the well-being of several innocent bystanders).

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[14] The "end" we are looking at here is neither a "thing" nor an "act" but a state of affairs that is characteristic of a proper balance between the complementary virtues.

Expanding the Model to Ethical Living

Knauer offers an alternative way of looking at virtue. Every virtue, he suggests, has a complement. The reason for this is because the thing that is named as a virtue is, in fact, not exactly in between the two extremes, but only a moderated version of one of the extremes – without losing sight of the moderated version of the other extreme. In facing danger or opposition, one needs to develop a sense of when it is appropriate to be "cautiously brave" or "bravely cautious." It is never purely one or the other; for if it is, then one has clearly fallen into an extreme.

Taking account of Knauer's idea, I attempted to see if his model could be applied to all virtues and to the whole of moral living. I did this by combining two things. On the one hand, I had my working list of virtues and I set about identifying which virtues might be complementary to each other. On the other, I had some idea about what kind of "human situations" might call for the exercise of some virtue(s). Alternating between these two points of departure, I sought to build a scheme to shed light upon the "ends," the states of affairs that might characterize the moral life. Although the options available to different individuals in (sometimes widely) different cultural, social, economic, political, or religious situations may appear to be incompatible in the literal sense, taking account of the notion that virtue itself lies on a continuum could help to explain why different persons doing different things may in fact be exhibiting the same, or at least an analogous, virtuous attitude.
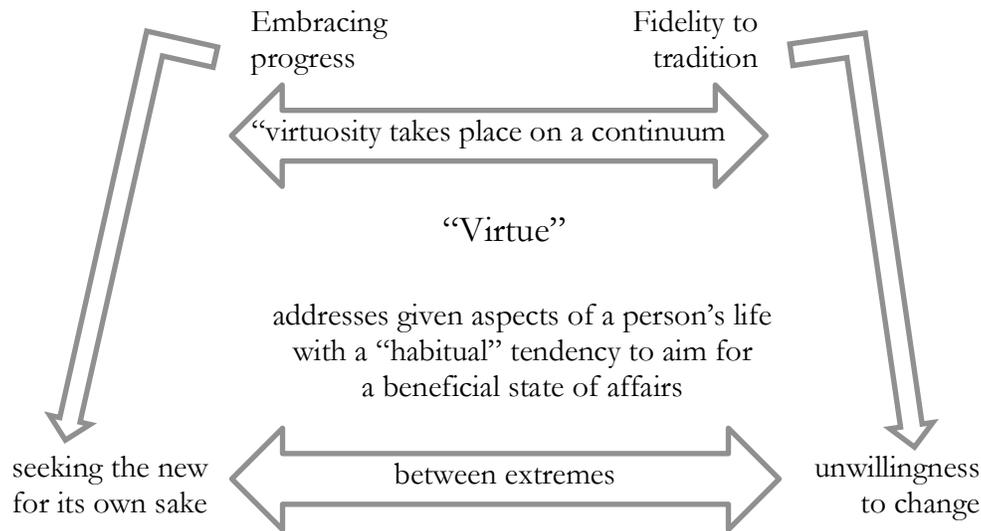
For example, the way in which a person might respond to a situation that creates fear, or the feeling that it is necessary to protect oneself or others, will need to be worked out in light of the real possibilities that person has available. If one enjoys physical strength and/or has appropriate material resources at hand, one might respond in a manner that appears to be very "brave" because there is less need to be "cautious" about getting injured. On the other hand, a person who is physically fragile and/or has little or no material resources to contribute to their self-defense may exhibit a great deal more "caution" than the first person described, while still taking a "brave" stand appropriate for the level of danger that is threatening.

The point here is not only that both of these persons may be described as "virtuous" in their response, but that the kinds of virtue that they are exhibiting are not at all opposites but complementary. Both are seeking the same end, a state of affairs in which what is realistically *possible* needs to be done to protect oneself or others. It is in the seeking of that end that both parties are engaged in the "same" (ethical) project, while externally their behaviors may be very different.

It was in this context that, while I was in the process of attempting to describe the complementarity of virtues, it occurred to me that the focal point of moral living is not the virtues themselves, but the identification of the human situations that the virtues were attempting to address. Our moral philosophical tradition had indirectly identified these situations by describing (at least one pole of) the virtues that address it. Why is it necessary to cultivate a certain openness to progress? The answer is because new things, possibilities, or options may become available which offer a better way of living. At the same time, one should not simply rush ahead toward something new simply because it is new. We need to balance a willingness to make progress with a fidelity to tradition that attempts to save what

was good in the past and that which remains good even through the experience of change. But we also need to avoid the unwillingness to change that would make any progress impossible.

Figure 3. Virtuosity is a Continuum

Embracing progress   Fidelity to tradition

"virtuosity takes place on a continuum

"Virtue"

addresses given aspects of a person's life with a "habitual" tendency to aim for a beneficial state of affairs

seeking the new for its own sake   between extremes   unwillingness to change

While the concept of virtue is a tremendous help in identifying the essence of moral living, it is not the virtues themselves that describe the ends or goals to be sought after. Complementary virtues identify areas of human living, situations that persons may (or may not) face in the course of their lives. These situations, in turn, call persons to be aware of certain states of affairs that are appropriate not only to the nature of the situation (e.g., adapting to new possibilities), but also to the relevant circumstances surrounding the situation (e.g., is change genuinely beneficial, does it threaten what was good in the past, will the community be able to grasp the need for change, and so forth).

The successful resolution of the challenge will depend upon identifying the appropriate place on the continuum of virtues (i.e., habitual responses that have become "spontaneous") that avoids both extremes. However, what is different here from the classical notion of finding the midpoint between two "extremes" is that what we are really looking for is the place on a continuum between two virtues, each of which represents a "qualified" (moderated) version of an extreme. Embracing progress is a qualified (by faithfulness to tradition) manner of seeking new things for their own sake, while faithfulness to tradition is a qualified (by openness to progress) manner of resisting change.

When I finished my attempt to describe the complementary virtues and the extremes they are avoiding, I also noticed that these could be grouped into different categories. There are eight "kinds" of situations that appear to demand attention from the ethically responsible person. Again, these groupings represent a first attempt to bring some order into the scheme and provide a framework for reflection.

The Virtuous Person

What, then, are the tendencies or dispositions we are suggesting? Before discussing these, I need to make some preliminary remarks. First, we must remember that there are cultural elements that enter into highlighting the important tendencies for dealing with anticipated situations. Thus, when I describe what I consider to be virtuous dispositions, I am doing so from the perspective of an older, white, male, Christian, European inhabitant.

Second, the eight paragraphs that follow correspond to the different categories (shown in bold) within which I believe the virtues can be grouped. After describing the issue being addressed (in italics), I present the complimentary pair of virtues in parentheses. Third, the order of presentation is not intended to convey any sense of hierarchy. Nor should one expect the overview to be complete or final. This is, after all, something of a first try to reframe the ethical paradigm according to a goal-oriented approach. I am quite sure that many will like to take issue with the details of this exposition and I encourage such critique in the interests of continued dialogue in the discipline.

To proceed, I believe that it is important for persons to cultivate a disposition toward **things that are beyond their control**. This would include *higher things* like philosophy, ideology, destiny, or the "supernatural"[15] (religion – ecumenism), but it would also encompass things like *authority* as well (obedience – questioning orders). One's *future* is to a good extent beyond control, although we can each be said to participate in it in the present (hope – fear and trembling). As the future unfolds, we need to develop an attitude toward *new things* (progress – fidelity to tradition) and frequently toward the need to *change* (adaptability – stability). Some of the things beyond our control, however, are *ignominious* and we will need to have an appropriate disposition for dealing with them (exposure – isolation).

Coming to grips with things around us entails our disposition toward phenomena with which we can interact. Important dispositions include our attention to our *surroundings* (awareness – focus), our *understanding* of what we experience (wisdom – imagination), and the tendency to construct our *knowledge* of our environment (discernment – ability to relativize). If we accomplish this process, we further need to develop an attitude with which to deal with the *information* we have gained (transparency – non-disclosure), to *order* it in a meaningful way (orderliness – deconstruction), and then to be able to deal with the *power* this entails (responsibility – autonomy). Simultaneously, we need to be ready to deal with things that *do not seem to fit* into our understanding of our surroundings (skepticism – humor).

Human persons are not solipsistic, but rather grow and thrive in interaction with others. Therefore we need to develop dispositions toward **going outside of ourselves** which first entails an identification of the *core self* (integrity – malleability). With this in mind, we formulate attitudes toward our own *self-image* (humility – confidence) and the image of self that we *project* to others (being demonstrative – retiring). With that as a background, we

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[15] A theist would be prone to use terms like God or sacred scriptures, but one need not be a theist to believe in something greater than oneself or, for that matter, all human beings. The well-known atheist, Carl Sagan, author of intriguing description of the "Cosmos," demonstrated a profound belief in "the human enterprise" which is concerned with the entire universe and beckons us to take up our role in relation to "the whole of reality."

become capable of *self-direction* (self-control – whimsicalness) and formulating a *vision* of what may be possible for our own wholeness and well-being (idealism – realism). To move toward that well-being and wholeness we need to have a tendency to develop a *strategy* (shrewdness – simplicity), which involves the use of the *time* available to us (cultural punctuality – spontaneity), so that we can ultimately make *commitments* to that which brings meaning and purpose to our lives (zealousness – hesitancy).

As with any ethical project, we need to come to terms with **concrete activity** and cultivate tendencies on how we are going to go about the business of human interaction. Foundational to any activity is the tendency to shepherd our *energies* (tranquility – excitability). On that basis, we can portion out our involvement at a *reasonable pace* (patience – restlessness) and work toward the realization of our goals. Maintaining *consistency* (reliability – innovatory), despite setbacks, and the tendency to bring things to *completion* is important (persistence – compliance). This applies especially to the tasks that we have set for ourselves in our *job or career* (diligence – quiescence), and the *conviction* that working to accomplish important goals is crucial (sacrifice – accommodation). Simultaneously, we should never forget that to continue to be fresh and creative, human activity should be *playful* (diversion – absorption) and should be willing to *share* the projects and aspirations of others (fidelity – judiciousness).

As **corporeal beings**, persons should cultivate an attitude toward their own body that demonstrates an appropriate level of *presentation* (modesty – exposure). We should be disposed to look after our *health* (salubriousness – asceticism) and demonstrate a tendency to invest in *growth* and development (constancy – florescence). As sexual beings, we should be disposed to creating a harmony in sexual expression. Because human *sexuality* is connected with fertility (intimacy – eroticism), we should develop a tendency to deal with *fecundity* in a responsible manner (regulating fertility – openness to procreation).

Human living also encounters **negative experiences**. Thus, we need to develop dispositions for dealing with *danger* or opposition (courage – prudence) as well as dealing with *injustice* (indignation – permissiveness). At the interpersonal level we also need to develop balanced attitudes toward *wrong doers* (mercy – punishment) and even develop a manner of dealing with *our own faults* (conversion – penance).

By far the most complex set of dispositions that we need to develop will involve our **interactions with other persons**. Interaction depends upon *communication* so that there is need to develop an attitude about revealing information (truthfulness – discretion). The focal point of our interaction should always be seen in the context of serving the *common good* for all persons (solidarity – self-sufficiency), which encompasses *persons outside our space* (hospitality – keeping distance). It is also important to be aware of the fact that we formulate attitudes not just toward individuals but also toward *groups of persons* (tolerance – discrimination). With this as a background, we certainly should not neglect our relations with *those in our immediate vicinity* (friendliness – formality). Our attitude toward *working with other persons* is crucial (collaboration – privacy) as well as our attitude not only toward giving but also *receiving from others* (gratefulness - expectation. Particular effort needs to be given to our attitudes toward *those in need* (compassion – self-care) while at the same time being determined to recognize the *dignity of each and every person* (respect – admonition). An attitude

about *reflecting others back to themselves* (tactfulness – forthrightness) will be helpful in reminding ourselves that we are at least in part responsible for the development of other's own self-images. Then, as members of one or more groups of persons sharing cultural and social aspects of what it means to live with others, such as in the case of nationality or ethnicity, we would do well to cultivate an attitude toward *citizenship* or belongingness (patriotism – civil-disobedience).

A good deal of ethical consciousness in past decades has encouraged the development of our attitudes toward our **physical and biological environments**. Besides our attitude toward the environment in general (being ecological – industriousness), there has been greater sensitivity with regard to how we use *material things* (detachment – stewardship) and care for natural *resources* (thrift – generosity). In Western society in particular we face the challenge of curbing our *consumerism* (moderation – indulgence) as well as exercising a prudent attitude toward how we deal with fluid resources in the form of cash or *money* (re-distribution – investment). We also need to examine our attitudes toward *other living creatures* (husbandry – non-interference) with which we share this earthly environment.

Ethics and Motivation

A general presupposition upon which this essay is based is that human persons do not perform voluntary activity unless they are motivated to do so. What may be different between this approach and the "ordinary" manner of understanding ethics primarily as a normative paradigm is the suggestion that persons are not necessarily motivated to perform activities (behaviors) but rather to work out what it might be that they want to accomplish. Thus, I drew attention to the formation of an intention to achieve a particular end or goal as logically prior to the choice of action or omission. After all, how would one be able to judge whether their choice of behavior was a good one or not if they did not have a standard for making that judgment? That standard, I suggest, is precisely the intention-to-end that flows from motivation.

Looking at motivation "from the other side" as it were, we need to ask where motivation itself comes from. As pointed out above, motivation can come from various sources. Ethical motivation has its origin in the habitual tendencies that have been built up in the course of one's life. These are usually referred to as virtues and vices. In this essay I have built upon the idea that virtues do not stand alone as a single medium between two extremes. Rather, virtues function as complementary pairs. Furthermore, working out the end or goal that a person may formulate and intend to accomplish depends upon an assessment of the real circumstances in which one finds oneself.

Identifying virtues and calculating the state of affairs that one will intend to bring about or maintain in a given set of circumstances involves a complex process that resembles more of an art than a science. Once a working "knowledge" or habit of virtue has been achieved, then, when one is faced with a rather straightforward ethical situation, the response of the person may be so rapid and "spontaneous" that the entire event appears to be simple and easy. When one faces a dilemma or when important pieces of a complete picture of what is happening are missing, the complexity of ethical deliberation and decision-making becomes more apparent.

When we go beyond the relatively simple, day-to-day ethical challenges that we all meet, there are few rules or guidelines for solving dilemmas. At the same time, dealing with these challenges can give us insight into ethical learning itself. It is through narrative, being attentive to the stories of ethically wise persons, and through reflection on ethical role models that we begin to see how the experienced, prudent, ethically upright person deals with issues that may seem intractable to the beginner. As Aristotle suggests, if one wants to know how to live ethically, the best way to do this is to observe an ethical person's life.

Learning through imitation allows one to assimilate a sense of what constitutes virtue and to develop tendencies to identify situations that call for virtuous thinking and, in turn, motivate one to take on situations while being pre-disposed to respond in a way that navigates between extreme forms of un-complemented virtue. The result is the formation of an intention to attain or preserve a state of affairs that constitutes our end or goal. With this resolved, one is ready to investigate, evaluate, and choose appropriate options for achieving that goal. This, I suggest, is how the moral event is structured.

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