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See also, on the page 'Israel and Palestinian ideology'

Jeff McMahan: a philosopher goes to war

Supplementary passages are in italics

Introduction

This is an outline of a very few issues: a very concise statement of my approach to some influential ethical theory and the application of {theme} theory. This isn't an introductory treatment. I don't explain, for example, the meaning of 'virtue ethics,' 'consequentialism' and the 'hedonistic calculus.' I don't attempt to give reasons for offering a contribution to ethical theory at a fairly high level of abstraction, so much at variance with the concrete and polemical tone of some of the pages which deal with ethical controversies.

Ethical discussion would benefit enormously by a replacement of natural language for one purpose above all and I introduce (in the column to the right) a symbol, the 'outweighing symbol,' >, which, together with the concepts and symbolism of {theme} theory, can not only introduce much greater clarity into ethical discussions but suggest new approaches to ethical theory and practice. From my page Introduction to {theme} theory:

'Natural language is recognized as a cumbersome and inadequate means of expressing most mathematical argument. Symbolic notation very often supplements or replaces natural language in logical argument. The information expressed in tabular form, in rows and columns, is superior to continuous prose as a means of expressing information in many cases, allowing comparisons to be made easily. Tabular display is used in truth tables, the rows showing possible assignments of truth values to the arguments of the truth-functions or truth-functional operators. Philosophers occasionally make use of diagrams. There are a number of examples in Derek Parfit's 'Personal Identity' (1971). Even so, most philosophical argument is in continuous prose. I think that symbolic notation as well as very concise but non-symbolic expression has great utility and can often replace or supplement philosophical prose.

'The symbolic notation I propose for the expression of some concepts has very little in common with Frege's 'Begriffsschrift' (1884): less rigorous but with a far wider application-sphere (the examination and generalization of 'application-sphere' is one of my aims.) I do share Frege's ambition, expressed in the Preface to the Begriffsschrift, 'if it is one of the tasks of philosophy to break the domination of the word over the human spirit by laying bare the misconceptions that through the use of language often almost unavoidably arise concerning the relations between concepts and by freeing thought from that which only the means of expression of ordinary language, constituted as they are, saddle it, then my ideography, further developed for these purposes, can become a useful tool for the philosopher.' Frege's ideography was difficult to implement. I have taken care to use only symbols which are typographically ready to hand.'

The discussion on this page should preferably be read in conjunction with the discussion on other pages, much more concrete, concerned with ethical controversies - bullying, the death penalty and ethical controversies to do with feminism, amongst others. The aphorisms below give further clues to my distinctive approach to ethics.

Aphorisms: ethics

From my page Aphorisms which gives most of the aphorisms I've written:

At the furthest reaches of morality: the Nazis who shot babies, gassed babies or set fire to buildings in which babies were burned alive, who would have felt revulsion if they had been ordered to boil babies alive. Probably, a few of them would have refused to obey.

The evil of aggressive, militaristic states has been overcome often by aggressive military action. When by pacifism?

A good cause may have to triumph over the methods used to promote it and the arguments used in its defence.

'You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours, but if you ever lacerate my back, I'll lacerate yours.' (Usually only the first part is given.)

Ethical purity - as unlikely and ineffectual as political purity.

'You just can't do that!' is easier to implement than 'You just can't be that!'

What we enjoy the most, what we are best at doing, what we are expected to do and what we ought to do may be very different matters.

The person who doesn't neglect any duties and obligations is as constrained as an invalid.

It's impossible to walk in unspoiled surroundings without causing some damage to the surroundings, but moral perfectionists are mistaken who see no difference between this damage and the severe damage which would be caused if we used heavy machinery. But moral action must sometimes be severely damaging.

The dog lovers who destroy the unwanted dogs they're unable to rehoming are to be admired, not the dog lovers who

About {theme} theory

My approach to ethics makes use of my own {theme} theory. Not all the {themes} in the list below are used in the discussion but all of them can be used. The most important single {theme} is {linkage}, < >, which, like other {themes}, plays a fundamental role in the mind's making sense of experience - and concepts not originating in experience. Metaphor is concerned with similarity amidst dissimilarity, with {linkage} but also with {contrast}, (). For more detailed information about the {themes} and my approach, a study of Introduction to {theme} theory would be very useful (I have to say, indispensable). From the introduction:

'{theme} theory is completely general and philosophy is only one application-sphere. These illustrative examples are very diverse in subject matter and in degree of abstraction: for example ethical argument, concrete problems in applied ethics, Nazi atrocities, Stalin, the death penalty, mathematical and philosophical relations, the completion of a proof, scientific correlation. There are also marked differences in tone: the tone appropriate to abstract and systematic subject matter but also forthright criticism, for example of Nietzsche, the juxtaposition sometimes of the abstract and the impassioned.'

'{theme} theory is based upon the conscious, and justifiable, ignoring in many cases of sphere-boundaries, such as the boundaries separating the material sphere, the conceptual sphere, the spheres of the different senses. A mathematician may attack a problem in the mind just as a soldier may attack an all-too-concrete machine-gun post. A scientific model may be material, the model constructed from materials of different kinds, such as wood and plastic, or the model may be purely conceptual, without material expression. Scientific modelling is an activity which can be practised in material or conceptual ways. Linkages may be material, such as a connecting rod in a mechanical system linking mechanical components or non-material, such as the ties of shared history linking, in some cases, nations.

Outweighing too ignores sphere-boundaries, where justifiable. Some application-spheres of outweighing outside the ethical sphere and including the ethical sphere:

When the allied forces defeated Nazi Germany and the other axis forces, (allied forces) > (axis forces).

To show that the outweighing was complete and not partial, the completion indicator □□ can be appended (completion) is listed below, with a link: (allied forces > □□ (axis forces.)

In this and other examples here, ethics has a linkage with the sphere of military power: the two spheres show homolinkage.

In a collision between a train A and a small car B, the two unequal masses are translated unequally as a result of the collision, B to a very much greater extent. In the dynamic description, A >> B.

Choices, decisions and preferences are routinely based on outweighing, consciously recognized or otherwise. If a decision concerns which of two matters has to be attended to first (A very important matter) > (trivial matter) but if the trivial matter has to do with a person who is very important to the subject and the important matter has to do with a person who is unimportant to the subject, then there may be {reversal}.

If A wins an argument (which may be concerned with matters as varied as morality and sport) against B (let's suppose that B concedes defeat), then A > B. The question of whether the victory was justified or not, or whether B was right or not to concede defeat, is a separate matter - {separation} has to be taken into account.

The dominant gene > the recessive gene.

List of {themes}:

- {adjustment} Å
- {completion} □
- {contrast} ()
- {direction} →
- {distance} D
- {diversification} √
- {linkage} < >
- {modification} Δ
- {ordering} Ö
- {resolution} @
- {restriction} ==
- {reversal} «
- {separation} //
- {substitution} S

In the list, the name of each {theme} is followed by the symbol for the {theme}. This page includes some extensions of notation. Each {theme} is highlighted. Clicking on the {theme} gives access to a page which gives instances of the {theme}. These instances show something of the range of {theme} theory, which addresses the most diverse areas of human experience and knowledge.

Outweighing

Some examples of outweighing and the outweighing symbol > to show that expression which use the symbolism is much more succinct and much clearer than a formulation in natural language, in this case obviously English, once the symbolism has become familiar, which takes very little time. Divergent claims can be compared and contrasted much more easily if the basic form is made clear. Extensions to the notation are introduced as need arises.

The death penalty

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all circumstances. The organization's policy is this:

'Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases without exception regardless of the nature of the crime, the characteristics of the offender, or the method used by the state to kill the prisoner.'

Amnesty International's opposition to the death penalty:

> (v) f vs (+ nature of crime, characteristics of offender, execution method.)

> (v) f is 'for all factors, without {restriction} for factors, universal quantification. Cf (v) x for all x in symbolic logic, (v), if used, follows the outweighing symbol >, ie, there is post-{ordering}, vs. 'is versus': the factors of the anti-thesis which could, arguably, count against the thesis but which are held to be outweighed.

Here, the quantifier is followed by amplification-brackets (+ ...) which give information about the factors specified.

The formulation which uses symbolism may omit some of the information conveyed by the formulation in natural language, or most of it (although all the information can be conveyed by means of amplification brackets) but it conveys the essence of the claim or the argument very clearly. Evidence for the outweighing claim or argument, if any, is clearly distinguished from these. Amplification brackets take the form (+ ...)

Although I was a death penalty co-ordinator for Amnesty International for a very long time, in general I oppose making a case for abolition of the death penalty in terms of human rights and I consider that there is no 'right to life.' My view, stated symbolically, is:

Opposition to the death penalty ~ > (v) f vs.

The symbol ~ here, read as 'not,' has to be distinguished from the symbol for negation used in symbolic logic, which in {theme} theory is an instance of 'general negation,' {resolution}:- (general negation), negation at a higher level of generality. If the symbol for negation is used in a text of symbolic logic, then no further identification is needed, but if the same symbol is used for this specialist purpose in a discussion of wider generality, then it has to be 'declared,' to make it clear that the symbol of greater generality is not being used. Declaration can be accomplished by means of the Declaration Indicator, Dn, with brackets which make clear the scope of the Declaration.

Ethical discussion which makes use of symbolism need not in the least exclude concrete components, including grim or heartening and heartfelt evidence and testimony. Amnesty International's unconditional opposition of Amnesty International, the thesis, can be followed by an anti-thesis, giving arguments against, arguments which I have in mind in stating my non-unconditional opposition to the death penalty. I give examples in a section No 'right to life' of my page on the death penalty.

An extract:

'In conditions not of a stable nation-state, equipped with prisons, but of a country occupied by Nazis, partisans who executed the Nazis were justified in killing out of hand - executing - the Nazis they captured.

'When Poland was occupied by the Nazis, an underground society did all it could to sustain the life of the Polish nation. Underground universities gave tuition, and underground courts attempted to dispense justice, in harsh and hideous circumstances. The courts did their best to be fair-minded: 40% of all trials ended with a verdict of not-guiltily. Only a tiny minority of Poles ever collaborated with the Nazis, but it was essential to take action against the Poles who did collaborate. The courts sentenced over 3 500 individuals to death for collaboration and something like 2 500 executions were carried out. Others were sentenced to corporal punishment or fines.'

The reasons given for outweighing, or the reasons which a critic may find for rejecting a claim for outweighing, will often take the form of ethical argument and accompanying evidence which appeals to deontology, consequentialism,

give their dogs expensive hair-trims and shampoos, the best of everything.

Ethics: theory, practice and notation

This section makes use of (theme) theory. See my Introduction to (theme) theory and the brief discussion in the column on the far right.

My approach to established ethical theory is pluralistic rather than monistic, in line with the thinking of W D Ross rather than the two most influential monistic theories, deontology and consequentialism. I see good reason for preferring consequentialism to deontology, but regard even the most developed and sophisticated versions of a hedonistic calculus as generally unhelpful in guiding a decision procedure. Nietzsche's criticism of Kantian philosophy (including, of course, deontology) was unformed - he could airily dismiss Kantian philosophy by describing it as 'Königsbergian' (referring to the place where Kant resided.) My own reaction to Kantianism could be summed up in a word, too, only slightly more adequately, perhaps - but I offer no amplification here. I'd describe it as a form of scholasticism. Philosophers generally aren't neo-Thomists, and they have found reason to reject the philosophical edifice of St Thomas Aquinas without giving detailed reasons, or any reasons at all, for opposing particular arguments in the Summa Theologica. Philosophers more often than not aren't neo-Kantian either, and again - although to a lesser extent - not by finding reasons to reject the philosophical edifice of Kant. In the case of Kant's ethical theory, its application can provide reason for suspecting it - for example, the celebrated case of the armed man and the need to tell the truth regardless of consequences.

Virtue ethics, including Aristotelian virtue ethics, should have a central place in any pluralistic ethical theory, I think. (This 'central place' should be quite congested, not occupied by one grand principle.) Life and death issues, issues to do with suffering and the reduction of suffering are central to the application of ethical theory - but so too should be a host of 'virtues' which go beyond these issues. A complete case can be built against bullfighting which makes no reference to the suffering of the animals - to do with anti-virtues of bullfighters and bullfighting supporters, such as their distortions and illusions. I provide documentation and argument at various places on the page Bullfighting: arguments against and action against.

Even so, the objections to virtue ethics are very great and have been inadequately explored, despite the vast attention which virtue ethics has come to receive. I discuss some difficulties in the section Can virtue ethics be salvaged? I think it can, but only by giving prominence to some features of the world not recognized by Aristotle or the philosophers who have written footnotes to Aristotle, including extreme contradictions, conflicts and paradoxes.

A further reason why I see the need for a pluralistic rather than monistic view of ethical theory is that I consider that a theory can have a high degree of adequacy in its application to mundane ethical decisions and a much lower degree of adequacy in life and death decisions. I'm influenced strongly here by Roger White's discussion of metaphor in his 'The Structure of Metaphor: The Way the Language of Metaphor Works'. Roger White finds reasons as to why some treatments of metaphor (such as the one presented in the book by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, 'Metaphors we live by' which I find exceptionally useful and interesting) have inadequate adequacy for complex metaphors to be found in literature, for example in the writing of Donne and Shakespeare. The examples which George Lakoff and Mark Johnson cite include, for example, 'He's *head and shoulders* above everyone in the industry. (This illustrates 'Significant is big.')

My own theory of metaphor and (theme) is intended to have adequacy in explaining simple examples such as this and developed literary metaphor.

It has sometimes been supposed that the ethical concepts and analytical techniques involved in this ethical dilemma have much more extensive applicability: an Oxford don at high table asking himself, 'Shall I or shall I not take another of these delicious creamy desserts?' It will be apparent - or it can easily be shown - that the ethical necessity in this dilemma is much greater: adult sailors in a lifeboat, no food and no hope of rescue in the short term, medium term or perhaps long term, asking themselves, 'Shall we or shall we not kill and eat the cabin-boy to keep ourselves alive?' Unlike the examples from literary metaphor, this makes no greater demands on richness and complexity of mind, only on very different attributes of mind.

Although I refer to ethical necessity above, this is one instance in which I don't subsume ethical necessity, together with logical necessity, in a generalized necessity, in which ethical necessity and logical necessity can achieve (separation) by (resolution). If some ethical choices seem the outcome of necessity, then this can only so in a fully deterministic ethical world, such as the 'necessitarianism' of Spinoza.

I find the concept of the 'first approximation' valuable but I use instead a linked concept, that of the 'starting point.' Epistemologically, G E Moore's defence of the common-sense view of the world has merit, I think, and should serve as a starting-point, but with no imposition of (restriction), such that the common-sense view of the world is treated as beyond doubt.

It would be an ethical common-sense view, one which deserves to be a starting point, that if someone is starving, he or she would be morally justified in killing insects or worms to stay alive. I'd defend this choice without the least hesitation. It would be also be a starting point that if a vegan is starving, he or she would be morally justified in killing a chicken. I'd defend this choice without the least hesitation, but many vegans would disagree, and some of them would perhaps disagree too, about the legitimacy of killing insects or worms.

These examples don't illustrate a version of ethical *necessity*, in view of the potential objections - even if these objections are ridiculous. I make use of the (theme) (ordering) to allow the expression of very much greater preferability - although this falls short of absolute ethical necessity. An action which is very much preferable has prior (ordering) and the action which is very much less preferable has post (ordering).

Power politics and military action are further application-spheres. If a far more powerful state, A, defeats in war a far weaker state, B, then militarily, in the case of this specific military action which resulted in victory (without any implication of ethical superiority, outweighing in the ethical application-sphere, of course), (A) > (B).

virtue ethics, moral particularism or moral pluralism and other ethical views. So, the claim (not endangering lives of partisans, partisans' families, other non-Nazis) >> (granting of alleged 'right to life' of Nazis) as a reason for killing captured Nazis can be supported by consequentialist arguments.

Unconditional pacifism

takes the same form. The symbolism allows the linkage with unconditional opposition to the death penalty to be appreciated at once. Although it would be easy enough to appreciate the linkage without using the symbolism, the gain in clarity remains. There are many linkages (and contrasts) which can be readily detected if the symbolism is used but which are concealed to some extent and which are harder to detect if the formulation is of the usual kind, using natural language.

Opposition to war > (v) f vs.

A strong case for going to war and a strong case against going to war

A subject facing a moral choice between two alternatives, A and B, may have good reason for deciding, using moral judgment (a good reason for feeling, without the exercise of moral judgment may be a bad reason for deciding) that

A > B.

The subject is facing a moral dilemma if

A ~ > B and
B ~ > A.

Gourmet eating

Quantification can be used in the form of comparatives. The default state is no quantification. An approximate value for quantification can be declared at the beginning of a discussion, if similar values obtain throughout.

If in a discussion there is a gradation, then > indicates outweighing to a lesser degree than >> which indicates outweighing to a lesser degree than >>>. The comma in >, indicates that quantification is indicated here, unlike the default condition, except in the case of declaration.

The outweighing symbols may be part of a series. For example, lesser degrees of importance, of intrinsic value (not the degrees of intrinsic value for individuals who may have a personal interest in one of them) for the activities humanitarian work, gourmet eating and olfactory pleasure can be arranged in this series (which happens to reflect my own view of the matter):

humanitarian work > gourmet eating > olfactory pleasure.

Some of the reasons for my viewpoint would benefit from a little amplification. The italics I use throughout the site to indicate supplementary material are an alternative to the use of amplification brackets, (+ ...)

Throughout his superb book of restaurant reviews, 'Incest and Morris Dancing,' Jonathan Meades takes for granted the extreme importance of high gastronomic standards. He writes, for example, 'London's gastronomic reputation is founded in hype. It reveals an apparently infinite capacity for self-delusion in both restaurateurs and customers.' And, 'When France remembers and reveres its peerless gastronomic patrimony ... its cooking is light years ahead of the rest of the world and light years behind too, thankfully.' ... the certain means of improving the repertoire of those nations which belong to the gastronomy's third and fourth divisions is to subject them to French technique.' (These sentences are far from being good examples of his lively stylistic talents.) He generally denigrates British cooking and praises the high standard of French cooking, allowing for exceptions. Whatever the standard of contemporary British cooking, in the 1930's the standard was far lower.

He mentions the 'gastronomically void' cooking of this generation - 'Bisto, custard powder, luncheon meat, tinned fruit, English sausages, mint sauce, sliced bread, filth, etc.' and in general, 'industrialised foodstuffs.'

The much higher gastronomic standards in France in the 1930's can be isolated, but a ((survey)) of the strengths and weaknesses of Britain and France at that time would give very different results.

'The polarisation of French society and politics - at a time when in Britain Communists and fascists regularly lost their deposits - meant that in the 1936 elections 37.3 per cent voted for the left-wing Popular Front and 35.9 per cent for neo-fascist parties ... Corruption, party rancour, demagoguery, anti-parliamentary leagues, anti-Semitism and a widespread opposition to the constitution itself were features of French politics in the 1930s in a way that they simply were not in Britain.' Andrew Roberts and Niall Ferguson, 'Hitler's England: What if Germany had invaded Britain in May 1940?' in 'Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals,' edited by Niall Ferguson.

Opposition to bullfighting

If X and Y are two 'ordinanda' - things to be given (ordering), a term I introduce, from Latin 'ordinare' - and the (ordering) is shown symbolically by >>> then X and Y may belong to different sub-spheres, for example the ethical and the aesthetic. The term sub-sphere is used here since the ethical and the aesthetic can be considered as belonging to the same sphere, the axiological.

A strong opponent of bullfighting who concedes (rightly or wrongly) that there are aesthetic dimensions to bullfighting but who maintains that the ethical objections very much outweigh these aesthetic dimensions will use the (ordering) in this case (ethical) >>> (aesthetic). A defender of bullfighting who happened to concede that the ethical objections to bullfighting are strong but who maintains that the aesthetic dimensions are of more importance will use the (ordering) in this case (aesthetic) > (ethical).

The sense given to >>> as in the case of other symbols can be 'declared,' to make it clear that the application-sphere of >>> is ethical throughout a discussion, for example.

Thesis and anti-thesis

Thesis and anti-thesis are explained in my page, 'Religions and ideologies.'

If a thesis - a set of arguments with supporting evidence - is challenged by an anti-thesis, another set of arguments with supporting evidence, and the arguments and supporting evidence of the thesis are demonstrably far superior to the

An actual military success and an ethical judgment belong to markedly different spheres (My approach is non-pacifist, without any judgment that all military victories are unethical). I distinguish the 'actuality-sphere' from the 'trans-sphere,' which has various sub-spheres, including the evaluation-sphere and the possibility-sphere.

What has happened in history, eg the defeat of Nazi Germany, belongs to the actuality-sphere. The evaluation-sphere includes the judgment that the defeat of Nazi Germany was ethically very desirable, the judgment that the coming to power of the Nazi party was very undesirable. The possibility-sphere includes the consideration that Britain might have been invaded by German forces during the Second World War.

Comprehensive and systematic indication of spheres requires extension to (theme) theory. Application-sphere is indicated by the use of ':'- as in (restriction):- (success) but, using this example, often, it's necessary to indicate the sphere of success, which may be aesthetic, scientific, financial ... {resolution}:- (aesthetic) → (architectural, poetic etc)

{themes} have {sub-themes}. For example, {modification} has {reversal}, which can also be stated in the form {/reversal} has {modification}. Expressing the matter in the very concise and economical form which my symbolic notation offers, « :- Ö ~ → Δ / (sense). The (theme) and (sub-theme) can also be given in the form {modification/reversal}. This schema can be extended to include categories which are not (themes) or (sub-themes). In most cases, these will be established concepts which are generally given declaration, by the use of the declaration indicator Dn or by using declaration brackets, / ... /. In many or most cases, it will be obvious that established concepts are used and the declaration can be omitted. The (non-thematic) component is appended to the (thematic) component. The (non-thematic) component may be arranged in systematic or semi-systematic form and if so, a system similar to the one used for computer directories, sub-directories and files is employed. These refer to successive stages of (resolution). A simple example, showing the (non-thematic) element of the compound term placed outside the brackets { ... }:

{restriction/ordering}/aesthetic/poetic

I use 'element' for the two components of the dyadic compound term, {thematic} and {non-thematic}, but an element of a compound term is obviously seen to be a compound in itself after practice of {resolution}. So, {restriction/ordering} is a compound term which can undergo further {resolution} to give two element terms, {restriction} and {ordering}.

Can virtue ethics be salvaged?

The application of hedonistic consequentialism and virtue ethics leads often to strikingly different results. What lessens hedonistic utility tends to decrease virtue but also to increase it. It tends to increase the range of virtue, to increase the maxima and minima of virtue. The Second World War is definitive: the minima, extremes of barbarism, the maxima, almost unsurpassable heroism, unselfishness, resourcefulness, determination, endurance, kindness, compassion.

A morose and selfish individual, or an individual who is deranged or warped for that matter, may be exceptionally ingenious and hard-working and devise new treatments for a disease. Work which is enormously beneficial may involve the sacrifice of the individual's personal development.

On my page on Feminist ideology, I discuss the achievement of the navvies who built the canals and railways in this country at the time of the Industrial Revolution, and what can be considered some serious failings as judged by some ethicists of the time:

'Men of Iron,' the superb book by Sally Dugan, is mainly concerned with the audacious work of the engineers Isambard Kingdom Brunel and Robert Stephenson (she also does justice to the genius of their fathers, Marc Brunel and George Stephenson).

'She writes of the navvies' work, 'Maiming or mutilation came with the job, and navvies were lucky if they escaped with nothing more than the loss of a limb. They worked using picks and shovels, crowbars and wheelbarrows, and their bare hands, the only other aid they had was the occasional blast of gunpowder. Some were blinded by explosions; others were buried in rock falls. All led a life of hard, grinding physical toil, tramping from one construction site to another in search of work. Their reputation for violence and drunkenness made them a frequent focus for missionaries and temperance society members, as well as turning them into the bogeymen of folk myth.' Elizabeth Garnett was the secretary of the Navy Mission Society and might have been expected to give a harsh verdict on their uncouthness and worse. Far from it. 'Men of Iron' quotes her words: 'Certainly no men in all the world so improve their country as Navvies do England. Their work will last for ages, and if the world remains so long, people will come hundreds of years hence to look at it and wonder at what they have done.'

The virtue calculus is no more straightforward than the hedonistic calculus. Both are essentially unworkable. The calculus in both cases involves nothing which can possibly be compared with money, which can be added and subtracted. Like is rarely compared with like.

In my conception of virtue ethics, very great importance is attached to (restriction), (separation) and (contrast). Human versatility is recognized as subject to great (restriction), in general. People who are exceptionally determined, oblivious of their own comfort, able to confront difficulties and to find ways to overcome them, hard, not soft, are very likely to be lacking in the softer virtues, such as understanding of human frailty, forgiveness of human weakness - although there are remarkable instances of (adjustment).

The 'perfect gas law' of Physical Chemistry is an approximation. It becomes increasingly exact as the pressure of the gas approaches zero. A real gas behaves more like a perfect gas the lower the pressure. At high pressures and low temperatures, deviations from the law become very marked. This is due to molecular interactions. The fact that theories become less useful or inapplicable under certain conditions is certainly true, I would claim, of ethical theories, including theories of virtue ethics.

Virtue ethics was formulated in conditions of comparatively low (restriction), the 'Aristotelian conditions.' It continues to be most successful in the analysis of similar conditions. Virtue ethics becomes inapplicable, unusable to a large extent in various conditions of high (restriction).

arguments and supporting evidence of the anti-thesis, then (thesis) >>> (anti-thesis).

The Greek slaves worked to death in the silver mines at Laurion, not in the least working in conditions of low (restriction), the workpeople who had practically no time or surplus energy for anything beyond work, and people in many other categories, of course, have been to a large extent beyond the scope of the theory.

Strenuousness, can be regarded as an underlying virtue, required for the practice of all others. Strenuousness is required for very many forms of work, or for seeking work, and many forms of work, or seeking work, require specific virtues, but otherwise, many people are and have been not in the least interested in strenuousness. It's recognized that athletes and some other groups have to be strenuous to have any chance of success, but the need for strenuousness is often overlooked. When circumstances change drastically, as in times of war and other crises, then people who were unstrenuousness show themselves capable of (adjustment).

There's marked contrast between the impressive intellectual energy which Aristotle devoted to systematization and exploration of concepts in the Nicomachean Ethics and the disappointingly conventional view of the ethical world, not sufficiently subject to empirical checks against reality. The same can be said of a significant part of the modern literature concerned with virtue ethics, such as Daniel C. Russell's 'Practical Intelligence and the Virtues.'

The refinement of concepts and, in the case of the Nicomachean ethics, the system-building sometimes lead to dereliction of duty - the duty of the virtue ethicist to refer to reality, to check the soundness of claims and statements against reality.

Some claims to be found in 'Practical Intelligence and the Virtues' are astounding and show that claim-checks haven't invariably been carried out. In Chapter 2, 'Right Action for Virtue Ethics,' there is this (P. 48, omitting the citations of the original):

'... virtue ethicists need not - and indeed most do not - think of virtuous persons as morally perfect persons.'

The existence of 'morally perfect persons' should surely be out of the question and a virtue ethicist should surely treat every claim to the contrary as completely unfounded. (I think that the check against reality which makes this demonstrable in the case of non-divine persons is applicable to Christ.)

The existence of 'virtuous persons' is not a defensible claim either, I'd maintain, or the thesis of the 'unity of the virtues,' discussed in Chapter 11 of 'Practical Intelligence and the Virtues.' In a footnote (P. 335, the author explains that he uses 'the weaker thesis that to have one virtue is to have them all.' He also explains that he isn't concerned with the stronger thesis that 'all the virtues are the same,' although he thinks 'it is worth taking seriously.' The thesis that all the virtues are the same surely isn't worth taking seriously.

People whose lives are full of self-chosen possibilities, subject to comparatively low (restriction), can cultivate, aspire to, work at and practise a wide range of virtues but successful practice is more often than not subject to high (restriction).

In a review in the 'Times Literary Supplement' of 'Intelligent Virtue' by Julia Annas, (No 5725 / 5726) Rosalind Hursthouse, another very prominent philosopher in the field of virtue ethics, writes of 'the skill analogy' which figures in Plato's early Socratic dialogues. The idea is that virtues are, in many ways, analogous to practical skills such as playing the piano, or tennis or golf, or being a competent plumber or electrician or cook ... Annas's point is that we need to learn practical skills, and the same goes for virtue. As parents know only too well, we are not born good [an astonishing generalization, as if parents can be assumed to be reliable moral arbiters] though quite possibly, as with some skills, some of us are born with a greater aptitude for learning to be kind or brave than others. Moreover, practical skills have to be learnt by practice - we acquire the skill of playing the piano by playing it, we become builders by building. Again, the same goes for virtue: we become generous by doing generous things, and brave by doing brave ones. Unfortunately, it also goes for vice. We become cruel and selfish by doing cruel and selfish things and, as Annas points out, our characters start being formed by those who bring us up from very early on, for good or ill. So this simple analogy with practical skills (that we need to learn virtue by doing virtuous actions) immediately highlights the importance of moral education from that early age.'

Moral education from an early age only guarantees a 'moral adult,' (leaving aside the difficulties in defining and finding such a person) if 'moral engineering,' (with a linkage with social engineering) is feasible. There are more than enough falsifying instances to make this doubtful. If there is a frequently reliable or frequently unreliable linkage between early moral education and the development of a moral adult, the linkage between a complete lack of early moral education, a brutal upbringing and the development of an adult who is no paragon of virtue is far better attested. Children subject to horrific abuse may become adults who are ready to brutalize any children they may have. My page 'The death penalty: reasoned revulsion' uses an argument against the death penalty which I call the risk of executing the damaged - the atrociousness of executing people whose childhood was of this kind.

Rosalind Hursthouse gives an objection to the view of 'the unity of the virtues,' which she describes, sweepingly, as 'the ancient Greek claim.' She explains that this claim is 'the idea that the virtues are not independent but imply each other and are unified by practical intelligence.' She writes that 'On the face of it, the skill analogy seems to support the contrary view; surely one can be honest and kind and still be a coward, just as one can be a brilliant concert pianist and hopeless at cooking.'

If the practice of virtue is the practice of a skill, we can ask if there are inherent difficulties of a serious kind in the exercise of moral skill, with a linkage with the obstacles to progress in reading and in manual dexterity constituted by dyslexia and dyspraxia. Surely there are. I emphasize very strongly that this isn't to equate dyslexia, dyspraxia and other difficulties in practising non-moral skills with 'difficulties' in practising moral skills, where the 'difficulties' are often disturbing or even revolting.

Given the equanimity with which many members of many societies (this is to estimate the problem at its least incidence) have tolerated gross abuses, such as slavery and the gross mistreatment of slaves, lack of moral skill has often been far more in evidence than accomplishment. This consideration is in itself a powerful argument against virtue ethics.

For all of recorded history, there has been division of labour, since it's impossible for one person to have mastery of all skills. In modern conditions, where the number of skills is

immense and many of them present enormous difficulties for the learner and often the practitioner, division of labour is fundamental. The variety of virtues, many of them intensely demanding, surely requires a degree of specialization, of a very different kind and for different reasons. It's possible to practise (adjustment) but often difficult to practise it.

When Rosalind Hursthouse's refers to the skill of piano playing, it's with awareness of the difficulties which moral life presents for human versatility, but I'd claim that the difficulties are underestimated, and on a massive scale. Living the moral life is more akin to putting on an opera production (mutatis mutandis, obviously) than playing the piano successfully, although the difficulties of the moral life can be illustrated by using an example from piano performance. A piano performance which is successful, in technical and artistic terms is more likely to be achieved than a successful opera production, at least if attention is confined to piano pieces which aren't amongst the most challenging. The many roles which are needed for an opera performance, successful or otherwise, have a linkage with the many moral roles of a single individual attempting to live the moral life. In the opera production, a tenor may be superb and the bass much less convincing, or all the solo roles may be excellent but the chorus may be disappointing. The tenor's voice may be superb, except in part of the singer's register, or the tenor's voice may be superb in most respects but not in the quality of vibrato. The tenor's singing may be generally superb but the tenor's acting may be weak - in one respect or more or most or all. The conductor may have multiple failings or fail in a few ways. Set-design, costumes and other aspects of the performance are likewise subject to (restriction)- (success). Although there's universal agreement on many aspects of performance, such as the importance of tone quality, there may be disagreement about the degree of success.

The moral life often calls on diverse, sometimes very disparate skills, to be practised in unexpected ways, making not just immense demands but unachievable demands. Success in achieving one objective, if success is possible at all, may entail failure in achieving another objective which is just as valuable. Politicians are more likely than many people to find that attaining and sacrificing, commitment and neglect, success and failure often go together. The (ordering) which gives priority to one objective rather than another has as a further application-sphere the virtues which are called upon in pursuing one objective rather than another. Some virtues must be given prior-(ordering), others post-(ordering).

Conjugates and excess baggage

Conjugates in ethics are composites, like composite poems, composite metals. The components of an extended conjugate C are

e1 < e2 (a, b, c ... n).









