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Swallowing a World: Virtue and Selfhood in the Postmodern Age

Honors Research Thesis

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Swallowing a World[1]

> "Everyman is me, I am his brother. No man is my enemy. I am Everyman and he is in and of me. This is my faith, my strength, my deepest hope, and my only belief."
>
> Kenneth Patchen[2]

In this essay, I hope to lend credence to Philippa Foot's picture of moral agents as "volunteers banded together to fight for liberty and justice and against inhumanity and oppression."[3] This is a picture of human beings as volunteers in a struggle against conditions hostile to human culture and all the fruits it can bring, cooperating not because of an imperative wholly external and otherworldly, but because they cannot meaningfully conceive of themselves as separate from this struggle. In developing this picture, I will (i) defend an anti-essentialist theory of self; (ii) defend virtue ethics as the best normative ethical view; and (iii) amend the traditional Aristotelian ethics of virtue so that it coheres with the anti-essentialist theory of self.

Part I: The self

1. Essentialism about selfhood

Essentialists about selfhood tend to affirm two theses, one metaphysical and the other epistemological:

> **Grounding:** The self is a metaphysical entity (i) whose persistence conditions do not coincide with the persistence conditions of the human being as a biological entity and (ii) that grounds and is conceivable prior to all practical and theoretical attitudes and activities of a person.

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[1] This title is borrowed from a passage in Rushdie, Salman, 1981, *Midnight's Children*, Random House, pp. 440-1:

> I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have been seen done, of everything done-to-me. I am everyone everything whose being-in-the-world affected was affected by mine. I am anything that happens after I've gone which would not have happened if I had not come. Nor am I particularly exceptional in this matter; each "I," every one of the now-six-hundred-million-plus of us, contains a similar multitude. I repeat for the last time: to understand me, you'll have to swallow a world.

[2] Patchen, Kenneth, 1971, *Wonderings*, New Directions Books.

[3] Foot, Philippa, 1972, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives," in S. Darwall, A. Gibbard, P. Railton (Eds.), *Moral Discourse and Practice*: *Some Philosophical Approaches* (pp. 313-9), Oxford University Press, p. 319.

> **Privileged access:** A person has absolutely privileged access to her self and can make her self intelligible through purely internal process, i.e., without reference to her history, surroundings, other people, etc.

Essentialism about selfhood—what John Dewey called "the belief in the fixity and simplicity of the self"[4]—can be seen in varying forms in Plato and "the theologians with their dogma of the unity and ready-made completeness of the soul,"[5] but it found its most trenchant formulation in the modern period. René Descartes method of radical doubt in *Meditations on First Philosophy* purports to discover the indubitable foundation for philosophy, science, and any kind of human psychology or anthropology—the *cogito* or disengaged thinking subject. For Descartes, intelligibility or significance owes itself to the deliverances of a mental process of inspecting internal representations and identifying those which carry an intrinsic mark of certitude—the clear and distinct ideas. The project of rendering ourselves and our world intelligible is in principle an entirely internal enterprise; indeed, without what Charles Taylor calls an "emphasis on radical reflexivity,"[6] Descartes does not think we can safely posit the existence of the kinds of entities and relations that an anti-essentialist about selfhood might take as constitutive of the self and the consequently the possibility of significance.

Edmund Husserl takes himself to be radicalizing the Cartesian project through his method of eidetic phenomenology. He calls for an *epoché* or bracketing of the "natural attitude" through which we normally situate ourselves in relation to ourselves and our world in order to establish a presuppositionless foundation for human inquiry. By stripping ourselves of the conceptual frameworks that usually condition both our *theoria* and our *praxis*, we can give pure descriptions

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[4] Dewey, John, 1983, "Human Nature and Conduct," in *The Middle Works of John Dewey*, Southern Illinois University Press, p. 224.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Taylor, Charles, 1989, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Harvard University Press, p. 143.

of the essences of phenomena from the perspective of the transcendental ego. Husserl is important both for his avowedly essentialist views—the rallying cry of his eidetic phenomenology is *Zu den Sachen selbst!* or “To the things themselves!”[7] and his method is concerned with the intuition of essences—but also because his phenomenological project was picked up and transformed into a hermeneutical or interpretive phenomenology by his student Martin Heidegger, a notable anti-essentialist who rejected the possibility of a completely pure transcendental point of view from which we can still make ourselves intelligible. Before discussing Heidegger’s positive views, as well as those of his anti-essentialist predecessor Hegel, I will discuss an anti-essentialist objection to the radical internalism of Descartes and Husserl.

2. A Nietzschean objection to essentialism

With his perspectivism, genealogical approach, and general skepticism about truth and knowledge, Friedrich Nietzsche is one of forebears of the anti-essentialist tradition. In the First Essay of *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche says

> And just as the common people separates lightning from its flash and takes the latter to be a *deed*, something performed by a subject, which is called lightning, popular morality separates strength from the manifestations of strength, as though there were an indifferent substratum behind the strong person which had the *freedom* to manifest strength or not. But there is no such substratum; there no ‘being’ behind the deed, its effect and what becomes of it; ‘the doer’ is invented as an afterthought, —the doing is everything. Basically, the common people double a deed; when they see lightning, they make a doing-a-deed out of it; they posit the same event, first as cause and then as its effect.[8]

While this passage is ostensibly a rejection of the subject, the claim can be read either psychologically or metaphysically. That is, Nietzsche may be positing a kind of psychological determinism according to which there is no free will, and hence there are no actions, but only events. Indeed, this interpretation is consistent with much of what Nietzsche says; he seems to

[7] Husserl’s motto suggests an affinity with Immanuel Kant, and it should be noted that though I focus on anti-essentialism as a reaction against Cartesianism, the two views I hope to reconcile in this essay—anti-essentialism about selfhood and neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics—can be seen as reactions against some Kantian doctrines.

[8] Nietzsche, Friedrich, 1997, *On the Genealogy of Morality,* Cambridge University Press, p. 26.

attribute agency to societal power constructs—most notably *ressentiment*—and social types—aristocrat, slave, etc. However, he also attributes responsibility to the "slaves" for subverting the aristocratic value system; it did not merely "grow" out of their social type, but was *their* deed. Moreover, such a psychological thesis would seem to undermine Nietzsche's project; he wants to accomplish a reevaluation of values—an effective reversal of the slave revolt—and speaks to the possibility of self-overcoming: tasks which seem to require "not only subjects of deeds, but even possibilities inhering yet unrealized in such subjects."[9] Indeed, he speaks of *expressions* of strength, rather than mere strength-events, which seems to imply some sort of psychological subject.

Robert Pippin suggests that "the doing is everything" signals the fundamentality of activity in the conception of the subject. He points to a passage from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: "Oh, my friend, that your self be in your deed as the mother is in the child—let that be your word concerning virtue."[10] What this passage suggests is that the relation between the self and the deed is not one of cause and effect; the self is expressed in the deed, but does not stand behind it as its ground. The self cannot be thought of as the "man behind the curtain." Pippin attributes two theses to Nietzsche, which he also finds in Hegel.[11]

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[9] Pippin, Robert, 2006, "Agent and Deed in the *Genealogy of Morals,"* in K. Ansell-Pearson (Ed.) *A Companion to Nietzsche*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd., p. 376.
[10] Nietzsche, Friedrich, 1978, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Penguin Books, p. 96.
[11] C.f. Pippin 2006, p. 380:

> Assume for a moment that there is a brotherhood of modern anti-Cartesians, philosophers united in their opposition to metaphysical dualism, to a picture of mind shut up in itself and its own ideas and so in an unsolvable skeptical dilemma about the real world, and opposed as well to the notion of autonomous, identifiable subjects, whose intentions and acts of willing best identify and explain distinct sorts of events in the world, actions. There is a range in such a group, including Nietzsche and Wittgenstein and Heidegger, but surely a charter member is Hegel.

The tenets shared by anti-Cartesians will reappear in relation to the Hegelian and Heideggerian contributions to the anti-essentialist conception of the self (in the next section) as well as Wittgensteinian skepticism about mechanisms underlying rule-following (in the discussion of anti-theory in ethics in Part III).

> **Non-separability**: "Intention-formation and articulation are always temporally fluid, altering and being transformed "on the go," as it were, as events in a project unfold."[12]
>
> **Non-isolability**: "The conditions under which one would regard an intention as justifying an action (or not) have to be part of the picture too, and this shifts our attention the person's character and then to his life-history and even to this community as a whole or to a tradition."[13]

What these anti-Cartesian theses entail is that subjects cannot be separated from their activity; the self is expressed through the deed and evolves with each deed; it is not the deed's ground and justification. Following Nietzsche, we can say that "only that which has no history can be defined."[14] The self is only ever manifested in an agent's activities, which form a historical narrative. We never see a subject separate from activity that is given content by a historical and social context; the subject "behind" the deed drops out of all explanation. Rather, we are left with a picture of the self as something simultaneously expressed by a person's activities and constituted by those activities. The Nietzschean critique of the subject externalizes the locus of significance; in order for an action to be successful, "I must be able to 'see myself in the deed,' see it as an expression of me (in a sense not restricted to my singular intention), but also such that what *I* understand is being attempted and realized is also what *others* understand."[15]

3. Historical anti-essentialists

Robert Pippin has argued that Heidegger and Hegel can be viewed as reacting against Cartesianism. On Pippin's interpretation, Heidegger and Hegel take issue with the following Cartesian doctrine:

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[12]Pippin 2006, p. 381.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Nietzsche 1997, p. 53.
[15] Pippin 2006, p. 381.

> **Mentalism**: "The world and entities within the world are, originally, significant or meaningful only as a *result* of the occurrence of such subjective states, or of some subject's intending, or linguistic, or representing, or synthesizing activities."[16]

Cartesianism, in Pippin's sense, encompasses not only Descartes' own dualistic views; Heidegger and Hegel, Pippin says, "would regard naturalistic, neuroscientific, and psychologistic accounts of such cognitive relations as still Cartesian, even if not wedded to the metaphysics of immaterialism."[17] Mentalism, taken as the claim that the locus of significance of human practice is something like internal representative success, "is still mentalism, no matter what *mens* is said to be made of or how it works."[18] According to Heidegger and Hegel, the locus of significance is essentially social; significance stems from "a certain network of tasks and functions and I understand such a network by appropriately participating in it, not by representing it."[19] In order to support the claim that Heidegger and Hegel were anti-Cartesians, and in so doing lay the groundwork for an anti-essentialist theory of self, I will discuss each philosopher in turn.

3.1 Heidegger

According to Heidegger, human selves (or Dasein) can only be understood in terms of Being-in-the-world. Being-in-the-world is essentially a relational state, but the 'being-in' of 'Being-in-the-world' does not signal a spatial relation, e.g., when a glass is in a cupboard. This is what he calls a "categorial" relationship; it applies only to entities whose Being is not Dasein. This type of relationship is found abundantly in the world we encounter, and we can in principle give incredibly long descriptions of the relations of an object to its environment based upon such a categorial understanding. However, this categorial understanding does not capture the relationship that Dasein and the world share. The 'in' of 'Being-in-the-world' does not signify a

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[16] Pippin, Robert, 1997, "On Being Anti-Cartesians: Hegel, Heidegger, Subjectivity, and Sociality," in *Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 375-6.
[17] Ibid, pp. 375-6.
[18] Ibid, p. 376.
[19] Ibid.

spatial relationship; rather, it is meant to express an existential relationship. Through an etymological analysis of the constituent terms of 'Being-in-the-world,' Heidegger presents the state, as a relation between Dasein and the world, as properly understood in the sense of one entity "residing alongside" or "being familiar with" another. Even more precisely, it may not be appropriate to characterize Dasein's Being-in-the-world as one entity (Dasein) residing alongside another (the world), for this distinction between entities is somewhat artificial. That is, Dasein cannot even be conceived without the world, and the world, from the perspective of Dasein, cannot be divested of the marks of Dasein's influence. The entities (especially Dasein) are not independent and self-enclosed, but are defined relationally. So it is better to understand Being-in-the-world as a dynamic state, wherein Dasein is absorbed in its environment and each is reciprocally affected by the other. For Heidegger, Mentalism cannot be true because "we are simply perfectly capable of moving about within, coping with, dealing with, items and projects in the world in a completely unthematic, absorbed way, without first or simultaneously representing the world to ourselves as such and such, and without applying rules, calculating probabilities, or consulting beliefs."[20]

The distinction between the categorial and existential readings of 'being-in' may seem like a trivial linguistic quibble, but it serves to underscore some important insights about the nature of Dasein. The distinction is meant to distance Dasein from other types of entities whose Being is merely (i) ready-to-hand or (ii) present-at-hand. When the Being of an entity is ready-to-hand, it is used as a tool for achieving some end, but is not "grasped thematically as an occurring Thing."[21] Heidegger's paradigm example is a hammer: in our everyday use of equipment like a hammer, we do not recognize the hammer as an entity in its own right. Rather,

[20] Pippin 1997, p. 382.
[21] Heidegger, Martin, 2008, *Being and Time*, Harper & Row, p. 98.

"our concern subordinates itself to the 'in-order-to' which is constitutive for the equipment."[22] That is, the hammer is used for its particular usefulness in some project without any regard to its ontological status. Heidegger describes our relationship with entities that are merely ready-to-hand as *primordial*; it is the manner in which we most often engage with our environment. In everyday life, we do not theorize about the ontological status of the objects we encounter; we are concerned with them only insofar as they are useful to some project. Entities whose Being is present-at-hand, on the other hand, can be the object of theorizing. Entities in the world are not typically encountered as present-at-hand; e.g., a hammer only becomes present-at-hand when it has failed to serve its purpose (that is, when it has broken). When an entity is encountered as present-at-hand, it can be disinterestedly analyzed because it is not an object of (the same kind of) concern.

So, according to Heidegger, entities in the world are encountered either as *existentiala* (Dasein) or categories (entities which possess either readiness-to-hand or presence-at-hand as their type of Being). In discussing Being-in-the-world, Heidegger makes it explicit that Dasein is not (typically) encountered categorially:

> The entities which correspond to [the two basic possibilities for characters of Being] require different kinds of primary interrogation respectively: an entity is either a "who" (existence) or a "what" (presence-at-hand in the broadest sense).[23]

This is not to say that regarding Dasein as merely present-at-hand is psychologically impossible, or even that it has not been observed as a social phenomenon; historically, this ontological miscategorization (whether intentional or not) has been carried out to morally reprehensible lengths. So Dasein can in fact be taken as present-at-hand, though it is not the attitude

[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid, p. 71.

appropriate to its Being. Heidegger further muddies this neat tripartite distinction of types of Being:

> Even entities which are not worldless—Dasein itself, for example—are present-at-hand 'in' the world, or, more exactly, *can* with some right and within certain limits be *taken* as merely present-at-hand. To do this, one must completely disregard or just not see the existential state of Being-in. But the fact that 'Dasein' can be taken as something which is present-at-hand and just present-at-hand, is not to be confused with a certain way of 'presence-at-hand' which is Dasein's *own*.[24]

By the very fact of being embedded in a world, Dasein possesses *facticity*, which is a type of presence-at-hand, albeit one far different from the presence-at-hand of a broken hammer. Dasein has a past which is a fact—it is unchangeable and something which it must grapple in understanding its Being. As Heidegger puts it, facticity implies that Dasein can "understand itself as bound up in its 'destiny' with the Being of those entities which it encounters in the world."

According to Heidegger, Dasein understands itself in terms of what it could be. It is never content with what it is or has been; rather, its understanding of itself is always "projected" towards future possibilities. However, a precondition of this kind of projection is that "it has in each case already been thrown into a world."[25] Heidegger signals this interconnection between Dasein's fundamental states (and likewise, the different segments of its history): "Being-ahead-of-itself," i.e. projecting future potentialities for its Being, is more precisely "Being-ahead-of-itself-in-already-being-in-a-world." In virtue of this, all significance is forward-oriented in the same sense as Dasein; something can mean something, or be meaningful, only insofar as it "has been 'tied up' with a "for-the-sake-of-which.""[26] For Heidegger, what all of this amounts to is a rejection of the traditional Subject-Object relation. A proper ontological picture of the world is not one in which a subject and a world of objects, separate in themselves, have been "welded

[24] Ibid, p. 82.
[25] Ibid, p. 246.
[26] Ibid, p. 236.

together," as Heidegger puts it; rather, Dasein and the world of objects it encounters are woven together through care, i.e. Dasein's projection of its multitude of potentialities.

So care can be given two formulations. In its basic formulation, the concept of care indicates that Dasein has a vested interest in the world it encounters; it does not simply contemplate the world disinterestedly, but develops projects to realize possibilities from a vast array of possibilities. More formally, care is the state of Dasein projecting its future possibilities as it is already absorbed in the world and its entities; it means "Being-ahead-itself-Being-already-in-(the-world) as Being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world)."[27] In encountering objects categorially, the essential attitude is *concern*, while in encountering other Dasein, the essential attitude is *solicitude*. Both ontological attitudes are forms of the more basic care, and from these basic ontological attitudes derive ontic attitudes like willing, wishing, desiring, worry, grief, etc. The crucial point is that, underlying all encounters between Dasein and other entities within the world in which Dasein is absorbed, the basic attitude at work is one of interest in the actualization of hitherto unactualized possibilities. No matter what projects we undertake, i.e., what possibilities we seek to actualize, we comport ourselves in an ontologically necessary way towards the entities implicated in those projects.

So far I have shown how Dasein's understanding is contingent upon two factors: (i) its environment and (ii) its concerns. In our environment, we encounter not only entities—tools, objects of theorizing, and other selves—but projects (both successful and aborted). Furthermore, from the premise that the self is constituted necessarily by its projects, as I sought to show in the last section, it follows that all other selves that are encountered in the environment are likewise constituted by their projects, and thus will always be encountered in the midst of some project. Just as the physical organism of the human being is inconceivable without extension through

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[27] Ibid, p. 237.

time, so is the human self inconceivable without some kind of narrative cohesion through time. Part of this narrative cohesion I characterized in the previous section as the "for-the-sake-of-which" in virtue of which anything can be significant to Dasein. Therefore, for any non-solipsistic account, other selves will likewise be encountered as active[28].

Similarly, the world is encountered in terms of "what is getting done and what is 'going to come of it.'"[29] In accordance with his reinterpretation of the traditional subject-object relationship, Heidegger reconceptualizes history. Rather than being a long chain of experiences (a history of the subject) or of motions of objects (a history of the object), history is defined in terms of the dynamic state of Being-in-the-world—"Dasein's historicality is essentially the historicality of the world."[30] Dasein's facticity is predicated on what already exists in the world—something which has a long history. However, the "world-historical" is largely defined by interaction with and alteration by Dasein; so "Nature is historical as a countryside, as an area that has been colonized or exploited, as a battlefield, or as the site of a cult."[31] The histories of Dasein and the world are mutually dependent; one cannot be conceived of without the other. Likewise the ready-to-hand and present-at-hand that are encountered within the world contribute to the world-historical and thus to Dasein's facticity. The world exists in its present state because of a complex history—a story that cannot be told without mention of various entities.

Because the self is always already conditioned by its historicality, it must organize this historical content, as it were, in order to define itself. That is, in projecting itself into the future,

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[28] I mean this principally in an ontological sense. For Heidegger, just as being alone is merely a deficient form of Being-in-the-world, since the necessary state of Being-in-the-world is presupposed in any attempt to make sense of the ontic state of being alone, attitudes like "leaving undone, neglecting, renouncing, taking a rest" are merely deficient modes of concern. C.f. Ibid, p. 83.

[29] Ibid, p. 440.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.

in order to conceptualize the range of its potentialities, Dasein first "computes its history."[32] Heidegger expresses this project like so:

> So if it wants to come to itself, it must first *pull itself together* from the *dispersion* and *disconnectedness* of the very things that have 'come to pass'; and because of this, it is only then that there at last arises from the horizon of the understanding which belongs to inauthentic historicality, the *question* of how one is to establish a 'connectedness of Dasein if one does so in the sense of 'Experiences' of a subject—Experiences which are 'also' present-at-hand. The possibility that this horizon for the question should be the dominant one is grounded in the irresoluteness which goes to make up the essence of the Self's in-constancy.[33]

This picture of the self—as needing to be pulled together from a vast amount of material—is the one that I hope to motivate throughout this essay. Heidegger's discussions of the meaning of Dasein gives a preliminary sketch of "the Self's in-constancy," i.e., its constant redefinition in the face of (in both harmony and discord) a shifting world upon which it defines itself. Furthermore, Heidegger presents an alternative to Mentalism and consequently an alternative to the essentialist self and the conditions for significance entailed by that Cartesian thesis. Significance occurs within a network of tasks and practices, not from an individualist perspective somehow outside these practices; we can only render ourselves intelligible in terms of this socio-historical network. Heidegger subverts the Subject-Object relationship that factors so importantly in essentialist theories of self and leaves the door open for solipsism; he explains significance instead in terms of a vast interconnected network of Subject-Subject relations.

3.2 Hegel

Though Hegel is less central to the thesis defended in this essay, many of the anti-Cartesian themes picked up by Heidegger are anticipated in his work. In the fourth chapter of his *Phenomenology of Spirit* entitled "Lordship and Bondage," Hegel presents his famed master-slave dialectic. The master-slave dialectic is an early stage in Hegel's dialectical system in the

[32] Ibid, p. 441.
[33] Ibid, pp. 441-2.

Phenomenology. The *Phenomenology* has been compared to the German *bildungsroman*—the "coming of age tale"—which follows "an abstractly conceived protagonist—the bearer of an evolving series of 'shapes of consciousness' or the inhabitant of a series of successive phenomenal worlds—whose progress and set-backs the reader follows and learns from."[34] These 'shapes of consciousness' begin with animal sense-certainty, progress through the creation of self-consciousness, the formation of society, and conclude with the attainment of Absolute Knowledge. The master-slave dialectic describes the transition from consciousness to self-consciousness, giving "the intersubjective conditions which he sees as necessary for any form of 'consciousness.'"[35]

To complete the transition from animal consciousness to the kind of self-consciousness distinctive of human beings is to gain a conception of oneself as importantly separate from other entities, i.e., to be aware that one's animal existence does not exhaust one's being, that one possesses a self over and above her biological make-up. Hegel rejects the essentialist notion that contemplation, understanding, or knowledge affects this transformation; he identifies desire as the transformative principle. The act of contemplation is passive, but desire removes man from the quietude of knowing, understanding, contemplating, and moves him to action. While contemplation leaves its object unscathed, the action that springs from desire is the negation, destruction, or at least transformation of its object. That is, desiring X presupposes the lack of X; to satisfy my desire for X, I must act on X and change it. I am hungry; the object of my desire—the food—must be transformed in order to satisfy the desire. Action is negation, and transformation is necessarily active. This negation or transformation is not mere destruction,

[34] Redding, Paul, 2010, "Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.*
[35] Ibid.

because the "objective" reality is assimilated to the "subjective" reality; the food is external to me becomes a part of me, a condition of my continued activity.

The kind of desire distinctive to self-conscious entities is directed towards the non-natural—towards desire itself. Here Hegel anticipates Harry Frankfurt's definition of personhood; for Frankfurt, a person (i.e. a self conscious entity) has second-order volitional desires (preferences which move her to action) in addition to first-order desires (e.g. for food).[36] Self-consciousness seeks to affect the negation and transformation of itself. The self is always becoming; it is never satisfied with remaining constant in its identity. As Heidegger later observed, self-conscious entities define themselves temporally; objects and animals are defined spatially. The self-conscious I always seeks to be what it is not, i.e., to become. To become is a negative act; to be something else in the future involves a transformative act on the material of what has been in the past and present.

If second-order desire is what moves humans to self-consciousness, human reality must be social; only in society are there a plurality of desire that serve as the objects of self-conscious second-order desires. In order to move beyond the animal herd and become human society, humans must direct their desires towards the desires of other humans. For Hegel, this uniquely human desire is for the recognition of other self-conscious entities. We want our subjective certainty of ourselves to attain the status of objective, i.e., intersubjective reality; "self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged."[37] Moreover, the self and the other "*recognize* themselves

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[36] C.f. Frankfurt, Harry, 1971, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 68:6:

> It is my view that one essential difference between persons and other creatures is to be found in the structure of a person's will. Human beings are not alone in having desires and motives, or in making choices… It seems to be peculiarly characteristic of humans, however, that they are able to form what I shall call "second-order desires" or "desires of the second order."

[37] Hegel, G.W.F., 1998, "Lordship and Bondage," in *The Hegel Reader*, Blackwell Publishing, p. 92.

mutually recognizing one another."[38] Hegel describes the struggle for recognition as a fight to the death. However, achieving the death of the other is self-defeating; death is the "natural negation of consciousness," and we can only be recognized and thus have our self-certainty validated by another living consciousness.[39] We want to keep the other alive, but take away his autonomy so that our autonomy remains secure; we want to enslave him so that we may unrestrainedly crystallize our subjective self-certainty.

For Hegel, the slave is essentially in a state of becoming, and history cannot progress without him. Because the slave must work for the master, he becomes "master of Nature"—he can transcend the given. In the technical world that he transforms through his work, he is master. Historical progress is only achieved through the work of the slave, and through his work he frees himself from the master and gains a less immediate, but more liberating mastery. Work is the defining characteristic of man beyond animal, i.e., man as becoming. It is this work that both humanizes the slave and creates the objective non-natural world—the cultural, historical, human world. And it is only in the context of this world that man lives a life separate from his animal life and elevates his subjective self-certainty to truth.

Hegel's story of the genesis of self-consciousness is anti-Cartesian in rejecting the notion that the self-consciousness is an entirely internal phenomenon. The conflict between the master and slave can be understood as that between a system of norms and practices and those who work within the bounds of these norms and practices. All progress and indeed, all significance (whether linguistic, mental, existential, or whatever), takes as its starting point a certain set of norms and practices that are shared by a group of people. It is the ability to adjust these norms and practices to our private and public purposes that creates history and creates selves. In the

[38] Ibid, p. 93.
[39] Ibid, p. 95.

next section, I will discuss how the Hegelian and Heideggerian insights about the essential sociality of human selfhood can find expression in a theory of selfhood.

4. The narrative self

The anti-Cartesian thought of Heidegger and Hegel goes some way towards refuting the pretensions of essentialism and developing an anti-essentialist view of the self. Such a view would pay homage to John Dewey's "recognition that selfhood (except as it is incased in a shell of routine) is in the process of making, and that any self is capable of including within itself a number of inconsistent selves, of unharmonized dispositions."[40] This is the self that Hesse's Harry Haller encounters in *Steppenwolf*:

> I saw myself for a brief instant as my usual self, except that I looked unusually good-humored, bright and laughing. But I had scarcely had time to recognize myself before the reflection fell to pieces. A second, a third, a tenth, a twentieth figure sprang from it till the whole gigantic mirror was full of nothing but Harrys or bits of him, each of which I saw only for the instant of recognition.[41]

In this section, I will develop a view of selfhood subsumed by the genus *anti-essentialism*. I will call it the *narrative view of the self*.

The narrative self takes as its starting point Heidegger's thought on the "self's Inconstancy." The self, according to the narrative view, is something that must be pulled together from vast amounts of material: experiences, memories, beliefs, desires (both aborted and satisfied), inclinations, plans for the future, etc. Drawing upon Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Hegel's externalization of the locus of significance, the narrative view of the self holds that a self is not something constructed merely from the inner life of the person whose self it is; intimations of selves can be gleaned from an understanding of a person's past experiences, the projects he involves himself in, and his future aspirations. Of course, there will be some privileged access to

[40] Dewey, p. 224.
[41] Hesse, Herman, 2002, *Steppenwolf*, Picador, p. 179.

the self from the first-person perspective, but this is only because each person tends to have better access to the constitutive material of her own self. As the name suggests, the narrative view of selfhood sees the self as akin to a narrative; it is something that is constructed from a wide range of material that does not necessary display an internal cohesion. Furthermore, selves can be measured in terms of certain standards: consistency, idiosyncrasy, and articulacy. As Dewey's recognition seems to suggest, consistency will likely only be partial. Freud has taught us to stop thinking of ourselves as having transparent access to the trappings of our minds; it is exceedingly likely, on this neo-Freudian picture, that we will have incompatible and delusional conceptions of ourselves.

Richard Rorty discusses how Nietzsche, Freud, and others have taught us to see the self as an "idiosyncratic lading-list, [one's] individual sense of what is possible and important."[42] In so doing, Rorty criticizes the hollowness of the "I" posited by essentialism, who "give us a mind exactly as long as the universe itself, a lading-list which was a copy of the universe's own list."[43] For Rorty, idiosyncrasy plays the individuating role so conspicuously missing from essentialist theories that posit a transcendental ego; it captures "those particular contingencies which make each of us "I" rather than a copy or replica of someone else."[44]Rorty looks to Nietzsche as the philosopher who taught us to think of self-realization and self-knowledge on the model of the poet rather than of the natural scientist. Nietzsche taught us to see self-knowledge as self-creation, as a redescription of one's past that changes all 'it was' into 'thus I willed it.'[45] Self-knowledge is to be conceived not only the model of crossing the boundary between the contingencies that every day present themselves to us and atemporal truth that is continuous

[42] Rorty, Richard, 1989, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, Cambridge University Press, p. 23.
[43] Ibid, p. 27.
[44] Ibid, p. 25.
[45] Ibid, p. 29.

between persons, but of crossing the boundary between the old and the new—between platitudinous ways of describing the raw material that constitutes the self and new, idiosyncratic ways of describing it.

Self-articulacy is the measure of to what degree one can non-deceptively[46] and lucidly describe one's nexus of experiences, memories, relations, etc. as demonstrating a series of thematic arcs and reflecting common defining projects. Charles Taylor has argued, *pace* attempts at a naturalistic reduction the self, that we cannot get by in the world without making strong qualitative discriminations about what is meaningful or worthwhile—without orienting ourselves in moral space, as he puts it. He criticizes theories of selfhood that suppose that the self can be an object of study akin to the material of the natural sciences, which fit four criteria:

1. The object of study is to be taken "absolutely," that is, not in its meaning for us or any other subject, but as it is on its own ("objectively").
2. The object is what it is independent of any descriptions or interpretations offered of it by any subjects.
3. The object can in principle be captured in explicit description.
4. The object can in principle be described without reference to its surroundings.[47]

The self is something that can only be described in thoroughly anthropocentric terms, for it is not something that can meaningfully be described in value-free biological or physical terms. While non-human animals can idiomatically be said to have a 'sense of self' in the sense of apperception or proprioception, they do not share the need to orient themselves in relation to a web of questions about the good. According to Taylor, "we are not selves in the way that we are organisms, or we don't have selves in the way we have hearts and livers."[48] Our selves are constituted (in part) by our interpretations, and so "to ask what a person is, in abstraction from

[46] The notion of self-deception is certainly complex, and we are likely all guilty of a degree of self-revision in our narrating, but the externalist view offered here suggests that accountability to shared memories and external criticism is necessary for a person's description of herself being non-deceptive in the sense relevant to self-articulacy.
[47] Taylor, pp. 33-4.
[48] Ibid, p. 34.

his or her self-interpretations, is to ask a fundamentally misguided question, one to which there couldn't in principle be an answer."[49]

Essentialist theories of the self have assumed that, like the subject matter of the natural sciences, there is a privileged description of the self—namely, the one generated by the individual whose self it is. Not only is the representationalist conception of language implicit in the notion of an 'objective' subject matter for scientific contemplation a contestable one; Wittgenstein, who attacked this very conception of language, has argued against the possibility of a private language in which such an individualistic privileged self-concept could be formulated. The language in which we formulate our selves is a shared resource, and there is neither a final word on what *the* uniquely satisfying description of the self is nor a way to take off our lexical spectacles, to use Quine's phrase, and see what we *really* are. The narrative view agrees with Wilfrid Sellars' thesis of Psychological Nominalism

> **Psychological Nominalism**: "all awareness of sorts, resemblances, facts, etc., in short, all awareness even of particulars—is a linguistic affair"[50]

in regards to awareness of the self; there is no such thing as immediate, non-linguistic awareness of the self. It is up for debate whether we can be immediately and non-linguistically aware of the material constitutive of the self,[51] but this material needs to be "pulled together" into a thematically coherent narrative in order to constitute a self. The only access we have to the self is through our descriptions of it. Taylor points out that the process of becoming more self-articulate can never be complete, for descriptions can only be clarified with further descriptions, which are by their very nature approximate and depend for significance on the context in which they are generated.

[49] Ibid.
[50] Sellars, Wilfrid, 1997, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, Harvard University Press, p. 60.
[51] Sellars of course famously rejected what he called "The Myth of the Given"—the notion that there is awareness akin to Russellian knowledge by acquaintance. I needn't adopt a position on this issue for my purposes; it suffices that Psychological Nominalism holds true of the self.

The process of self-building cannot be finished except by death. Italo Calvino's Mr. Palomar recognizes this fact:

> A person's life consists of a collection of events, the last of which could also change the meaning of the whole, not because it counts more than previous ones but because once they are included in a life, events are arranged in an order that is not chronological but, rather, corresponds to an inner architecture.[52]

Of course, some people are sadly unconcerned with building an articulate, idiosyncratic self, and the task is left to their peers. Jean-Paul Sartre warns against this abandonment of the self-building project in describing those who fall into bad faith. Nietzsche polemicized the herd mentality that believes the self to be ready-made and so leaves its creation to the priestly class or the invisible hand of society or whoever, those who fail to realize that "the horrific struggle to establish a human self results in a self is inseparable from that horrific struggle… our endless and impossible journey toward home is in fact our home."[53] From Heidegger and Hegel, we have learned that the self cannot exist except in the social, technical human world with a history; from 20th century linguistic pragmatist philosophers we have learned that this existence is contingent upon a shared, but malleable language. And from numerous fiction writers lucidly familiar with the state of the human self in the modern age, we have learned how the process of building a self resembles that of constructing a narrative. It is an artistic calling, and one which we all share, despite the plurality of methods and media we employ. What remains to be developed is how an awareness of one's own syntax, as it were, ought to illuminate that of others, and so bind us together in the ethical life.

Part II: Virtue

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[52] Calvino, Italo, 1983, *Mr. Palomar*, Harcourt Brace & Company, p. 124.
[53] Wallace, David Foster, 2006, "Some Remarks on Kafka's Funniness," in *Consider the Lobster*, Back Bay Books, p. 64-5.

Part II, like Part I, has both a negative and a postive element. In the first section, I present G.E.M. Anscombe's critique of the normative ethical theories dominant in the modern period and her suggestions for a successor vocabulary to that of the modern period. In the second section, I discuss eudaimonistic virtue ethics as it has been developed in Aristotle and Alasdair MacIntyre. In Part III, I will synthesize the insights from the previous two parts into a coherent picture of the ethical self in the postmodern era.

1. Anscombe and the resurgence of virtue ethics

The mid-twentieth century saw the resurgence of a neo-Aristotelian approach to ethics. The spark for this resurgence is usually attributed to G.E.M. Anscombe's 1958 essay "Modern Moral Philosophy," in which Anscombe defends the controversial thesis that the central concepts of moral philosophy are bankrupt and without content. In defending this thesis, Anscombe suggests that much of the conceptual apparatus used by modern moral philosophy be dropped and replaced with the pre-moral conception of ethics as concerned with the promotion of virtuous character that was defended by Aristotle in *Nichomachean Ethics*. Before giving a preliminary definition of the virtues (a task that Anscombe saw as impeded by the lack of proper conceptual resources during her time), I will be focusing on Anscombe's criticisms of the battery of concepts employed by modern moral philosophy and her suggestions for successor concepts.

In Anscombe and the subsequent champions of contemporary virtue ethics[54], we find a general strategy of argument: take the most barebones, uncontroversial principles of a

[54] C.f. Foot, Philippa, 1972, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives," in S. Darwall, A. Gibbard, P. Railton (Eds.), *Moral Discourse and Practice*: *Some Philosophical Approaches* (pp. 313-9), Oxford University Press and Foot, Philippa, 1984, "Utilitarianism and the Virtues," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 57: 196-209 for Foot's criticisms of the deontological notion of a categorical imperative and the consequentialist notion of an overall outcome, respectively.

contemporary normative ethical theory, examine the use and history of the terms used in these principles, and show that they are little more than pseudo-concepts. Anscombe's focus is on the use of distinctively "moral" uses of terms like 'ought' and 'wrong.' What Anscombe hopes to show is that the distinctively "moral" use of these terms is bereft of content because the terms have been separated from the historical and philosophical context that made them intelligible. Anscombe begins by pointing out that the modern sense of 'moral' was conspicuously lacking in Aristotle's ethics. In Aristotle, there is a distinction between moral and intellectual virtues. Modern moral philosophers might ask whether a failure in regards to an intellectual virtue might have moral (in the modern sense) implications. The moral implications of such a failure, Anscombe suggests, would be the blameworthiness of the failing agent. But this will not do, for it seems that any failure can be arbitrarily blameworthy without the act of blaming having any distinctively moral import. For example, it would not be inappropriate to criticize or blame a workman for creating a faulty machine, but such reproach would not be required, as the concept of a moral failure might suggest. So modern moral philosophy depends on a concept of "moral blameworthiness," which Aristotle lacks; in Aristotle, there are certain mistakes which may make man a scoundrel, but it does not follow that the man has a categorical obligation not to make such mistakes. For Anscombe, the task is to investigate the demarcation between ethical terms in their non-moral and moral senses.

The terms 'should' and 'ought' are found in their non-moral senses in everyday speech, e.g. in statements like "If you want to achieve some end ε, then you ought to perform actions *x*, *y*, and *z*" or "You should do *x* to promote your flourishing." However, 'ought' has come to have a distinctively moral sense, where it implies some absolute verdict. Sometime between Aristotle and the modern day, 'ought' came to have a moral sense in which it was equivalent to 'is

obliged,' 'is bound,' or 'is required to;' it came to be analogous with the 'ought' given by legal obligation. Anscombe suggests that this sense of 'ought' is a holdover from the Christian law conception of ethics, under which persons had a moral obligation under divine law not to perform certain actions. The terms used in Aristotle's ethics were transformed to reflect this changing conception of ethics:

> In consequence of the dominance of Christianity for many centuries, the concepts of being bound, permitted, or excused became deeply embedded in our language and thought. The Greek word " ἁμαρτάνειν," the aptest to be turned to that use, acquired the sense "sin," from having meant "mistake," "missing the mark," "going wrong." The Latin *peccatum* which roughly corresponded to ἁμαρτημα was even apter for the sense "sin," because it was already associated with "culpa"—"guilt"—a juridical notion. The blanket term "illicit," "unlawful," meaning much the same as our blanket term "wrong," explains itself.[55]

Anscombe goes on to say that Aristotle did not have a blanket term like 'illicit' or 'wrong.' Under his conception of ethics, blanket terms like 'villain' and 'scoundrel' persons, and it would be absurd to make such a final verdict on the basis of a single action. The terms he had for actions applied to specific deficiencies in virtues, such as 'unjust' and 'impious,' but he lacked the moral 'wrong' that we use today. Anscombe suggests that, although we have largely lost the conviction that what is needed in order to be a good or bad moral agent is prescribed by divine law, the concept of what we 'ought' to do has retained the sense of being bound by law in certain contexts. So the concept of moral part of 'ought,' deprived of the context that made it intelligible in the first place, is nothing more than a certain emphasis or force added to the non-moral sense of 'ought.'

[55] Anscombe, Elizabeth, 1958, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *The Journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy*, 33: 5-6.

In defending her claim that the moral ‘ought’ lacks content distinct from that of the non-moral ‘ought,’ Anscombe discusses Hume’s famous is-ought problem. In *A Treatise of Human* Nature, Hume claimed that:

> In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary ways of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when all of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, *is*, and *is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought*, or an *ought not*. This change is imperceptible; but is however, of the last consequence. For as this *ought*, or *ought not*, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it shou'd be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason should be given; for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it.[56]

On the traditional reading of this passage, Hume’s claim is that a conclusion about a value cannot be inferred from purely factual premises. Anscombe argues that if there is such an “is-ought” problem, there must also be a problem with the “is-owes” and “is-needs” transitions. But, though the transitions are philosophically interesting, they are not problematic in the least. Using the Humean distinction between relations of ideas and matters of fact, Anscombe gives the following “is-owes” case:

> Suppose that I say to my grocer “Truth consists in either relations of ideas, as that 20s=£1, or matters of fact, as that I ordered potatoes, you supplied them, and you sent me a bill. So it doesn’t apply to such a proposition as that I owe you such-and-such a sum.”[57]

Since there does not seem *prima facie* to be any problem with the “is-owes” transition—the grocer certainly would not accept this reasoning—there must be something wrong in Hume’s line of reasoning. Anscombe explains the “is-owes” transition through the notion of “relative bruteness.” A group of facts such as those given in the example about are brute relative to a description like “X owes Y so much money” when, if facts xyz hold, then description A generally holds, but xyz’s obtaining does not necessarily entail A, because there will sometimes

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[56] Hume, David, 1978, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Oxford University Press, p. 469.
[57] Anscombe, p. 3.

be exceptional circumstances that cannot always be theoretically imagined before hand, i.e., worked into a factual definition of 'owes.' Furthermore, the further fact that I owe the grocer a sum that I have not paid would be brute relative to the description "I am a bilker," where 'bilking' is a kind of dishonesty or injustice. Using the apparatus of relative bruteness. Anscombe successfully derives evaluative, if not distinctively moral in the modern sense, terms from merely factual premises.

She likewise gives an explanation of the inference from 'is' statements to 'needs' statements. To say that, e.g., a plant needs certain conditions to obtain in its environment is to say that it won't flourish without those conditions. By enumerating the conditions that actually *do* obtain in the plant's environment, one can infer what the plant needs. Alasdair MacIntyre makes a similar observation about "is-ought" transitions with functional terms:

> From such factual premises as 'This watch is grossly inaccurate and irregular in time-keeping' and 'This watch is too heavy to carry about comfortably,' the evaluative conclusion validly follows that 'This is a bad watch.' From such factual premises as 'He gets a better yield for this crop per acre than any farmer in the district,' 'He has the most effective programme of soil renewal get known' and 'His dairy herd wins all the first prizes at the agricultural shows,' the evaluative conclusion validly follows that 'He is a good farmer.'[58]

Since 'watch' and 'farmer' are functional concepts, i.e., implicit in the use of the terms is an understanding of what it would be for a watch or farmer to work well, there is nothing controversial about the inference from factual to evaluative concepts. Hume's argument against the "is-ought" can only apply to "is-ought" arguments without functional concepts. Since moral arguments are supposedly subsumed under this category, MacIntyre argues, Hume and other Enlightenment thinkers, who failed to rationally ground morality, must have been working with a non-functional concept of persons. This was quite a drastic change from Aristotle's ethics, where ethics was concerned with the transition from "man-as-he-happens-to-be" to "man-as-he-could-

[58] MacIntyre, Alasdair, 2007, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, University of Notre Dame Press, p. 58.

be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature"[59]. That is, Aristotle saw persons qua persons as having a *telos*, just as persons qua a profession have a *telos*, i.e., a functional definition on the grounds of which an evaluative claim can be derived from merely factual premises about the person. MacIntyre seems to suggest that such "is-ought" arguments about functional concepts are not even enthymematic; the 'ought' statements validly follows from the 'is' premises without the supplementation of conditional premises that bridge the gap, so to speak.

Upon demonstrating that "is-ought" arguments are no more problematic than "is-owes" and "is-needs" arguments, Anscombe suggests that Hume's conclusion *does* apply to moral uses of 'ought.' This is because the 'morally ought' lacks content out of the context which gave it meaning; it is not even possible to derive 'morally ought' statements from other 'morally ought' statements because it is impossible to infer a meaningful conclusion without meaningful predicates.' Since 'morally ought' has only a psychological effect of adding emphasis to a non-problematic non-moral use of 'ought' by making the 'ought' seem more pressing and emphatic, it lacks content distinct from the non-moral 'ought' and cannot play any significant inferential role. In a remark echoing G.E. Moore's Open Question Argument, Anscombe suggests that, even when there is a verdict on what morally ought to be done, there may still be a verdict on whether or not to accept that verdict. That is, for any set of law-like moral principles that would guarantee the significance of the moral use of 'ought,' it is always an open question whether or not to accept those principles. So those who appeal to the moral, law-like sense of 'ought,' i.e., all modern moral philosophers, have no ground to stand on.

Anscombe briefly considers possible replacements that the divine law conception of ethics, i.e., conceptions of ethics that retain the binding law-like force of obligation in the moral use of 'ought' without appeal to God. She considers three candidates. The first candidate is the

[59] Ibid, p. 52.

norms of a society. Anscombe rejects this candidate on the grounds that the fact that a set of principles are norms of a society to not suffice to give the law meaning to 'ought;' whether this happens must depend on the content of the norms, and she believes it appropriate to exercise some Socratic doubt about whether the norms of a society lead to good. She likewise rejects the idea that a law conception of ethics can be salvaged by an appeal to contractualism on the basis that contracts cannot secure all the particularities that we want in a system of ethics and that contracts cannot be made without the explicit consent of all those bound by the contract. The last candidate for a replacement to the divine law conception of ethics is a neo-Aristotelian concept of the norms of human virtue. Just as there are certain norms about what the right number of teeth a person should have, where the number is a balance between different extremes, so can persons as such be evaluated on the basis of such virtues. Under this concept of norms, a good person will be a person with the relevant virtues because having such virtues is conducive to their flourishing. The neo-Aristotelian notion of "norms" does not retain the emphatic sense of being bound that is found in law conceptions of ethics. Anscombe suggests that Aristotle's virtue vocabulary can be a successor to empty statements about the emphatic moral 'ought' and 'wrong.' She claims that it would be a significant improvement if "bad" actions were evaluated as 'untruthful,' 'unchaste,' 'unjust,' etc. instead of as 'morally wrong' because, given a sufficient theory of motivation, the virtues can be given uncontroversial factual definitions; therefore, the application of a predicate regarding the failure in a virtue will have a definite factual significance instead of an "emotive" or "psychological" significance. In the interest of promoting virtue vocabulary as a successor to modern moral vocabulary, I will now turn to two positive virtue ethical accounts.

2. What is virtue?

2.1 Aristotle

Virtue ethics in its classical form was developed by Aristotle in the *Nichomachean Ethics*. For Aristotle, ethics is concerned with the good, but this statement must be qualified. The good varies depending upon one's interests—"in medicine this is health, in strategy victory, in architecture a house, in any other sphere something else"[60]. That is, different practices are defined by characteristic actions that aim towards certain ends; these ends are the good which gives the practice its purpose. But ethics cannot be concerned with just any such end; many ends are not final ends, but are chosen as means to a further end. A final end in Aristotle's terminology is final when it is "in itself worthy of pursuit." The finality of an end comes in degrees; some ends may be pursued only as means to other ends (money, say), some are pursued both for their own sakes and for the sake of another end (honor, say), and some ends are pursued only for their own sake. This last category of ends Aristotle calls "final without qualification"[61]. Ethics, then, is concerned with the end (or good) which is final without qualification. He suggests that happiness fits such a role; happiness "is something final and self-sufficient, and is the end of action"[62].

Happiness is a central concept in Aristotle's virtue ethics, but it is also prone to misinterpretation. The Greek εὐδαιμονία or eudaimonia has been variously translated as 'happiness,' 'flourishing,' and 'well-being.' 'Happiness' is a problematic translation because it suggests a subjective state about which any agent could not be mistaken. A virtue ethicist may meet a hedonist who claims to be happy and would have no ground to contradict him. However, the virtue ethicist would not concede that the hedonist is thereby *eudaimon*. Eudaimonia is not

[60] Aristole, 2002, *Nichomachean Ethics*, Focus Publishing, p. 7.
[61] Ibid, p. 8.
[62] Ibid.

defined by the degree of physical or psychological comfort or pleasure that an agent enjoys. Rather, eudaimonia is an externally determinable state; it is the state of living well as a human being. 'Flourishing' better captures this aspect of 'eudaimonia.' But since animals can flourish by the standards of their species, 'human flourishing' best translate the notion of an objective state of living well as a human being.

Just as the good is relative to different practices, living well is relative to function. To determine whether a carpenter or a flautist is performing her role well, one has to appeal to the standards characteristic of that trade. These standards derive from the function of the role. It is not appropriate to fault a carpenter *qua* carpenter for a poor embouchure or to fault a flautist *qua* flautist for shoddy craftsmanship. Moreover, each tradesperson can be measured against the standards characteristic of their trade by non-professionals (though perhaps with less subtlety than others of the some trade). Similarly, parts of the body are said to perform well or badly based upon their characteristic function in the organism. In order to determine the final end without qualification of human action, Aristotle considers what might be the characteristic function of humans. This function cannot be mere survival and growth, for these functions are shared with plants, or these functions plus perception, for these functions are shared with non-human animals. The characteristic function by which the concept of flourishing gains significance in humans must then be a kind of life lived in accordance with a rational principle. For Aristotle, "human good turns out to be activity of soul exhibiting excellence"[63]. So the final good for humans is eudaimonia, which is functionally defined as a life lived in accordance with certain excellences. Whether a person attains this good is judged on the basis of a complete life:

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[63] Ibid, p. 9.

"for one swallow does not make a summer; and so too one day, or a short time, does not make a man blessed and happy"[64].

The excellences to which Aristotle appeals in his definition of "the good life" are the virtues. Aristotle divides the virtues into two categories: the moral and the intellectual. The intellectual virtues are developed by teaching and are the capacities by which one determines the moral virtues. Moral virtues are character traits that are developed by habit; we are born with the capacity for moral virtue, but we only become truly virtuous by conditioning ourselves to choose virtuous actions where we might naturally have chosen vicious ones. Virtues are *states of character*, rather than passions or faculties, where states of character are the "things in virtue of which we stand well or badly with reference to the passions"[65]. Virtues cannot be passions because, as we have seen, a person cannot be judged virtuous on the basis of one action. Virtues cannot be faculties because they are inborn and virtue is something to be learned. Virtues must then be states of character, i.e., character traits that describe our tendencies towards actions that display different passions in relevant circumstances.

Of the intellectual virtues, *phronesis* or practical wisdom is the most instrumental in one's leading a virtuous life. According to Aristotle, practical wisdom is "a true and reasoned state of capacity to act with regard to the things that are good or bad for man"[66]. Practical wisdom is, in short, an ability to determine what course of action will in particular circumstances secure the good for the person acting. What constitutes an excess, defect, or its intermediate vary depending upon the agent and her circumstances; practical wisdom is the intellectual capacity by which one determines what is the appropriate course of action, from the perspective of the virtuous life, given the vicissitudes of concrete cases. As an intellectual virtue, practical

[64] Ibid, p. 9.
[65] Ibid, p. 17.
[66] Ibid, p. 39.

wisdom is not something that is inborn, but rather something that must be learned by moral education and experience in moral deliberation. Practical wisdom distinguishes those that possess natural virtues from those that possess virtues in the governing sense. Aristotle admits that there are those who are naturally disposed to act in accordance with virtue, but in order for them to be virtuous in the governing sense, they must have practical wisdom. Put another way, "virtue is not just an active condition in accord with right reason, but one that *involves* right reason, and practical judgment is right reason concerning such matters"[67]. Practical wisdom galvanizes the link between one's intentions to act in accordance with virtue and their actually doing so. A child may be naturally disposed to be kind, but lacking practical wisdom, might be kind to a person who would benefit more from brutal honesty in a particular situation. So too might someone act courageously to bad ends, e.g., in fearlessly pulling off a bank heist. There is an intimate connection between one's dispositions to act and intentions in so acting and the reasoned capacity that determines when these dispositions and intentions constitute virtues in the governing sense. Rosalind Hursthouse points out that the situational appreciation characteristic of practical wisdom involves seeing certain facts of a situation as more salient than others. So for example an adolescent lacking in practical wisdom but with a natural disposition to act kindly might "still tend to see the personally disadvantageous nature of a certain action as competing in importance with its honesty or benevolence or justice"[68]. Such a situational appreciation is something that comes with life experience, including familiarity with the intricacies of human interaction, and because of the great variety of virtue-relevant situations with which we are presented, there is no helpful way to distill practical wisdom into a set of deontological rules that can be memorized and systematically applied.

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[67] Ibid, p. 117.
[68] Hursthouse, R., 2007, "Virtue Ethics," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.*

Alasdair MacIntyre makes a number of helpful observations about Aristotle's ethics that help bridge the gap between classical and contemporary formulations of the theory. He points out that "there is relatively little mention of rules anywhere in the *Ethics*"[69]. He suggests that our surprise at this fact owes to the differences between modern society and ancient Athenian society. In Aristotle's Athens, there was little distinction between the subject matter of ethics and that of law. It was the law's job to give rules, but these rules were only to apply to those whose vices were intolerably destructive to the shared ends of the *polis*. So a lack in virtue that renders one inefficient or useless in such shared ends would be deserving of ridicule of one's character—deprecations like 'scoundrel' and 'villain'—but only when one's vices became affront to the community project would it merit the intervention of the law, which was rule based. In the modern age, due to the popularity of liberal individualist theories of societal relations, we have largely lost this concept of shared ends. Moreover, Philippa Foot (in her critique of consequentialism) suggests that ethics (and in particular an ethics of virtue) can get along fine without positing such shared ends; this point will be taken up later in the essay in connection with my notion of pluralistic teleology. MacIntyre accuses Aristotle of a sort of historical shortsightedness; he fails to see how his particular account of the virtues is grounded in the nature of the Athenian city-state, which involves reprehensible defenses of xenophobia and slavery. MacIntyre suggests three problems in Aristotle with which an acceptable contemporary neo-Aristotelian account of virtue ethics must grapple: (i) defining the *telos* of human life without appeal to Aristotle's unacceptable metaphysical biology, (ii) making the definition of virtues sufficiently general and flexible that they can be applied to societies other than ancient Athens, and (iii) rejecting Aristotle's concept of the unity of the virtues. The problem of the unity of the virtues is this: if the virtues form a "simple, coherent, hierarchical unity," how can conflict

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[69] MacIntyre, p. 150.

arise? Aristotle, who borrowed the notion of the unity of the virtues from Plato, explains any such conflict in terms of character flaws. MacIntyre thinks that a contemporary virtue ethical theory needs to take into account the kind of tragedy inherent in life, the artistic representation of which Nietzsche praised in *The Birth of Tragedy*, to explain how a diversity of values and circumstances can lead to conflict that do not necessarily constitute a denunciation of one's character. MacIntyre's solutions to these problems will be handled in the following section.

2.2 MacIntyre

MacIntyre's account of the virtues starts from the fact that throughout history there have been numerous seemingly incompatible definitions and hierarchies of virtue. The central question of his account is whether these different conceptions of virtue can be seen as forming a unified history, or whether different virtue theorists were in fact working with entirely different concepts with some terminological coincidence. MacIntyre considers five historical models of the virtues: the Homeric model, the Aristotelian model, the New Testament model, Benjamin Franklin's model, and Jane Austen's model. Under the Homeric model is perhaps the furthest from our modern conception of virtue; physical strength factors in as one of the chief human excellences. The New Testament model was an effective reversal of many of the Homeric and Aristotelian virtues; humility and meekness factor in as virtues, and what were once virtues—magnanimity and physical strength—become vices. Another interesting point of departure between the classical theory of the virtues and the New Testament model was the availability of virtue to slaves. As we have already seen, Aristotle's virtues were available only to those considered a part of the *polis*, i.e., aristocrats and freemen. Christianity's reversal of what was to count as a virtue similarly changed what groups were candidates for virtuous living. Nietzsche's

genealogical account of the slave rebellion in morality coheres nicely with MacIntyre's history of the virtues. Nietzsche describes how the "slaves" that were to become to the priestly class subverted aristocratic values with reference to the "thin" evaluative concepts of good-bad and good-evil. MacIntyre, without the vitriol that pervades Nietzsche's genealogy, similarly shows how the interests of a specific societal group at a specific historic period figure in the definition of "thick" evaluative concepts like virtue concepts. Benjamin Franklin's account of the virtues was utilitarian and concerned with advancing one's status within the educated classes of Philadelphia and Paris, whereas Jane Austen defined the virtues in reference to the civil married life of her time.

What MacIntyre takes these changing concepts of virtue to show is that a definition and hierarchy of the virtues is only coherent within a particular social context. Indeed, from a list of the virtues of a society at a given time, it seems that one can derive at least a prefatory idea of what the interests of that community are. Homeric Greece was a 'heroic' society, Aristotle's Athens was dominated by politics (in the early sense of things concerning the steady operation of the *polis*), early Christianity was concerned with performing well in the eyes of a judging God, and Franklin and Austen's societies were characterized by the business of orienting oneself well in a socially and ideologically striated society. In order to capture the sense in which the virtues are meant to be useful in attaining the social projects characteristic of the society that gives them their significance, MacIntyre appeals to the notion of a practice. In MacIntyre's special use of the term, a practice is

> any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and the human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.[70]

[70] MacIntyre, p. 187.

Examples of practices in MacIntyre's sense include the "arts, sciences, games, politics in the Aristotelian sense, [and] the making and sustaining of family life"[71]. MacIntyre's definition of a practice relies on the distinction between goods external to a practice and goods internal to a practice. The first class of goods are "externally and contingently attached" to the practice, such as "prestige, status, and money"[72] Goods internal to a practice can only be had through that specific practice and are specifiable and recognizable only through participation in that practice. Participation in a practice involves consenting to be held to standards beyond one's own. It is, for example, not up to me to decide whether I am a good philosopher; I am held to certain standards (clarity, rigor, cleverness, attention to detail, etc.) characteristic of the practice in which I participate. If I am unable to admit my inadequacy in judging philosophical ability before I have the relevant experience and training in the practice, I will likely be unable to succeed and reap the internal goods characteristic of philosophy. External goods are such that one person's having them leaves less for other people; there is only so much prestige, status, and money to be doled out. Additionally, one person's obtaining an external good is only a good for him and those immediately affected by his success in obtaining external goods (family, friends, etc.). Internal goods involve competition, but when a member of a practice obtains them, not only she but the entire community surrounding the practice benefit. When a philosopher publishes groundbreaking results, not only does she obtain the goods internal to the practice of philosophy, but the community benefits from the new possibilities of discourse that have been opened to them.

On the basis of this distinction, MacIntyre gives a preliminary definition of virtue: "A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to

[71] Ibid, p. 188.
[72] Ibid.

achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevent us from achieving any such goods."[73] MacIntyre believes that this definition of virtue (with some extra caveats attached) avoids the aforementioned problems in the classical Aristotelian theory without sacrificing its basic character. First, MacIntyre's account is teleological, in that it posits an end to human action and concerns ethics with that end, but it locates this *telos* at a social rather than cosmological level. Secondly, it explains the variance in theories of the virtues along geographical and historical axes. Thirdly, MacIntyre's account allows for a plurality of different and incompatible virtues—a refutation of the Platonic-Aristotelian notion of the unity of the virtues. The account remains Aristotelian in its refusal to identity human flourishing with hedonistic pleasure; the distinction between internal and external goods is meant to do this work. MacIntyre believes that this first pass definition needs to be supplemented by a fuller account of the unity of a human life in order to avoid excessive conflict amongst the virtues and satisfying explications of the individual virtues. Since I have already provided an account of the unified narrative self in the first part of this essay, I will not go into MacIntyre's thoughts on this subject here. What is important is that MacIntyre has managed to give an account of the virtues that captures their appropriateness to specific social and historical contexts. What I will suggest is that the context in which we find ourselves, especially upon accepting an anti-essentialist narrative view of the self, is one in which virtue discourse would be of great usefulness.

Part III: Anxious Cosmopolitanism

Before developing the main thesis of this essay, it might be helpful to summarize what has been established up to this point. Part I set up a contrast between two types of theories of selfhood: essentialism and anti-essentialism. I depicted the anti-essentialist tradition in contradistinction to the essentialism of Descartes and Husserl as spawning from Hegel's account

[73] Ibid, p. 191.

of the advent of self-consciousness and finding its mature expression in Heidegger's rejection of Cartesianism in *Being and Time*. Part II presented virtue ethics as a viable alternative to the reigning dichotomy of "modern moral philosophy," one that has seen a resurgence in the 20th century. I discussed Aristotle's seminal defense of virtue ethics and MacIntyre's modern adaption of the theory.

In Part III, I defend the thesis that the conjunction of these two theories—anti-essentialism about the self and eudaimonistic normative virtue ethics—offers a compelling picture of what it is to live the good life in the "postmodern" era. In order to defend this thesis, I will be obliged to adapt Aristotle's teleological conception of eudaimonia to cohere with a broadly Heideggerian story of what it is to be a self in our age. This project is shared by MacIntyre, who sees a number of problematic theses arising from Aristotle's lack of insight into how the peculiarities of his own historical era affect his conception of what it is to live the good life. Part III will be divided into three parts. The first will discuss the desiderata of an adequate amendment to the Aristotelian picture for our age. The second will discuss in more detail Heidegger's early thought on the human *with-world*. The third and final section will trace the connections between the virtue of justice and the personal quest for self-perfection. In these final sections, I want to motivate the following points:

1. Self-perfection (understood in the anti-essentialist sense as a conjunction of consistency, articulacy, and idiosyncrasy) is a virtue. (anti-essentialism about selfhood)
2. Justice is a virtue. (virtue ethics)
3. Aristotle's doctrine of the unity of the virtues is false, so self-perfection and justice can conflict. (anti-theory in ethics)
4. There is no fully articulable decision procedure for deciding ethical conflicts. (anti-theory in ethics)
5. In general, justice imposes limits on self-perfection, but an ideal balance can only be achieved by those with the kind of situational appreciation distinctive of the virtuous person.

1. Eudaimonia in the postmodern age

As discussed in Part II, MacInytre takes issue with Aristotle's virtue ethical theory on three counts. First, we need to rethink the *telos* of human life so that it does not presuppose an antiquated vitalist biology. More specifically for my purposes, we need to rethink the *telos* of human life so that it respects the seemingly non-teleological nature of our best theory of selfhood in the modern era. Though this phrasing rings of paradox, we can retain a loosely teleological conception of human flourishing without recourse to metaphysical or theological vitalism or determinism as long as we have a sense of our peculiar historical orientation. The importance of a historical sense leads into MacIntyre's second criticism: that Aristotle fails to account for historical variances in the canon of the virtues and their importance in social life. The view presented here makes no pretense to universal and ahistorical validity; it is a theory of what it is to be a self and what it is to live the good life *in our age*. It is at least probable that selves and human flourishing were very different in, e.g., the Middle Ages, when philosophy and educated culture was dominated by a combination of scholasticism and Catholicism. Thirdly, MacIntyre criticizes Aristotle's theory of the unity of the virtues. The relatively recent movement within contemporary ethics of *anti-theory in ethics* will provide a more radical reading of Aristotle's *thesis of non-codifiability* that deals with this issue.

1.1 Pluralistic teleology

Following MacIntyre's relativization of the definition of a virtue to practices, which are themselves temporary historical inventions, we can make sense of a eudaimonistic virtue ethics without committing ourselves to any one view of what it is flourish as a human being (more precisely: as a human self). As we have seen, Aristotle sees ethics as concerned with the transition from "human-as-(s)he-happens-to-be" to "human-as-(s)he-could-be-if-(s)he-realized-

(his/her)-essential-nature"[74]. But the anti-essentialist theory of the self rejects the notion that human beings have an essential nature outright. So how are we to reconcile these two views? The crucial move is to rethink the notion of the progress towards self-perfection. Instead of conceiving as this quest as the movement *toward* a set goal—the revelation of a human being's "true" or "essential" nature—, we can conceive of it as the movement *away* from a deceptive, inconsistent, commonplace, and inarticulate understanding of oneself. So the eudaimonistic life, under this revised understanding, can be provisionally equated with the *process* of becoming ever more articulate about oneself. Ethics then is to be concerned with the transition from "human-as-(s)he-happens-to-be" to "human-as-(s)he-could-be-if-…"

"(s)he-were-more-self-articulate"

or

"(s)he-were-more-idiosyncratic"

or

"(s)he-were-less-self-deceptive"

or some combination of these states, which occur on a continuum that has no set end-goal. The transition with which this revised eudaimonistic virtue ethics concerns itself is an ongoing project as described in Part I, a project that can in principle only be terminated by death due to (i) the infinite malleability and reinterpretability of the language in which a self must be couched and (ii) the dizzying complexity of human "being-in-the-world."

The view of eudaimonia offered here is then pluralistically teleological. It accepts the Aristotelian line that there is something attainable for human beings called 'flourishing' which involves a transition from their given circumstances, but denies that this transition has a universal and determinate end-goal. The pluralistic redefinition of eudaimonia is concerned with

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[74] MacIntyre, p. 52.

the process itself, rather than the goal, since the goal can in principle never be reached. What it is for an individual to lead a eudaimonistic life will depend in large part upon her socio-historical circumstances and what projects and practices in which she chooses to immerse herself. With this amendment, we can retain a eudaimonistic virtue ethics (as opposed to, e.g., a sentimentalist view like that of Hume's) while holding a view of the self that is attractive and appropriate to our historical period.

1.2 Postmodern virtue

In using the admittedly nebulous adjective 'postmodern' to describe our age and the virtue associated with it, I mean nothing more than that we inhabit an age that is largely post-religious. Our age has accepted the Nietzschean dictum that "God is dead,"[75] not merely in the sense that fewer and fewer people profess to believe in the existence of a Supreme Being, but more so in the sense that we've come to see the entire question as irrelevant. It is simply not the case that we cannot give a coherent ethics without God, and we needn't abandon the hope of ethical justification for action beyond its having freely been chosen, as Sartre claims in "The Existentialism of Humanism." As I will discuss in the next section, indeterminacy in ethical scenarios does not entail that certain ethical concepts can have normative force, as Sartre seems to think. As Anscombe and other contemporary virtue ethicists argue, the widespread acceptance of Nietzsche's dictum makes traditional law ethics incoherent. The canon of virtues needn't be avowedly atheistic; it should not address the God question at all. As Foot says in "Virtues and Vices," the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas on virtue are "as useful to the atheist as to the

[75] C.f. Nietzsche, Friedrich, 1974, *The Gay Science*, Vintage Books, p. 167:

> *New struggles*.—After Buddha was dead, his shadow was still shown for centuries in a cave—a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown. –And we—we still have to vanquish his shadow, too.

I suggest here that our evaluative and self-descriptive discourse is in a position to step out of this shadow.

Catholic or other Christian believer."[76] Similarly, Hursthouse hopes for an ethics that can accommodate the differences between theists and atheists (as well as realists and anti-realists). I make no pretense of drafting up a complete postmodern canon of the virtues here, but what is of the utmost importance is that it does not include exclusivist terminology like Aristotle's 'barbarian;' we want to move from defining virtue not in terms of the Athenian *polis*, but rather in terms of the *cosmopolis*. Similarly, I follow Lyotard's definition of postmodernism as "incredulity toward meta-narratives."[77] An adequate picture of the postmodern human, which I suggest synthesizes eudaimonistic virtue ethics with anti-essentialism about selfhood, needn't posit all-encompassing narratives—"the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth,"[78] or what have you—that define a unified project among all persons. To capture the ethical self in our distinctive age is to affirm pluralism without abandoning the possibility of cooperation and normative guidance.

1.3 Anti-theory in ethics

Rosalind Hursthouse describes a number of her fellow contemporary virtue ethicisists, including Annette Baier, John McDowell, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Martha Nusbaum, as proponents of *anti-theory in ethics,* which she takes to be the position that virtue ethics does not constitute a normative theory, where 'normative theory' is understood as "a set (possibly one-membered in the case of utilitarianism) of general principles which provides a *decision procedure* for all questions about how to act morally."[79] McDowell defends an anti-theory view through a discussion of Aristotle's Thesis of Non-codifiability (hereafter TNC), which holds that

[76] Foot 1978, p. 106.
[77] Aylesworth, Gary, 2005, "Postmodernism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.*
[78] Ibid.
[79] Hursthouse, Rosalind, 1996, "Normative Virtue Ethics," in S. Darwall (Ed.), *Virtue Ethics* (pp. 184-202), Blackwell Publishing, pp. 194-5.

"the best generalizations about how one should behave hold only for the most part," i.e., it cannot be expressed in a universal formula or set of rules that applies to all relevantly similar particular cases.[80] One way of thinking about the motivational capacity of virtues is to express moral reasoning in the form of a practical syllogism, where the major premise is a universal moral formula, the minor premise is some piece of knowledge about the particular case, and the conclusion is the prescription to act. McDowell argues that the thought that a moral outlook can be codified into a universal formula or set of general principles stems from a widespread prejudice about rationality that was attacked by Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations*. Expressing the lesson of Wittgenstein's discussion of rule-following, Stanley Cavell writes:

> We learn and teach words in certain contexts, and then we are expected, and expect others, to be able to project them into further contexts. Nothing insures that this projection will take place (in particular, not the grasping of universals nor the grasping of books of rules), just as nothing insures that we will make, and understand, the same projections. That on the whole we do is a matter of our sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, sense of humour and of significance and of fulfillment, of what is outrageous, of what is similar to what else, what a rebuke, what forgiveness, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal, when an explanation—all the whorl of organism Wittgenstein calls "forms of life." Human speech and activity, sanity and community, rest upon nothing more, but nothing less, than this. It is a vision as simple as it is difficult, and as difficult as it is (and because it is) terrifying.[81]

In short, the lesson is that we should not think of our ability to follow rules (like extending a mathematical series, say, or acting virtuously) as owing to some psychological mechanism that guarantees that, with the proper attention, we will not err. We should think of rationality and rule-following as owing to the convergence of innumerable subjectivities, rather than "divination" of some externally authoritative objectivity. McDowell urges us to think of the rationality required by a moral outlook as an appreciation of salient features of particular

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[80] McDowell, John, 1979, "Virtue and Reason," in S. Darwall (Ed.), *Virtue Ethics* (pp. 121-43), Blackwell Publishing, p. 127.

[81] Cavell, Stanley, 1969, "The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy," in *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (pp. 44–73), Cambridge University Press, p. 52. Quoted in McDowell, p. 129.

circumstances, rather than the concept-application following from some universal and in principle articulable knowledge. McDowell's theory is aptly labeled 'anti-theory' because it involves skepticism about the possibility of giving criteria for properly rational (and in particular, moral) action external to appreciation of and interaction in what Wittgenstein called "forms of life."

After giving up on this picture of rationality, the model of moral reasoning as a practical syllogism can be maintained without violating TNC. Instead of the major premise being a piece of universal knowledge, it can be thought of as some *oretic* state, i.e., "a desire convertible *via* some minor premise into an action;" namely, the virtuous person's conception of how to live. According to TNC, this conception cannot be fully articulated; "any attempt to capture it in words will recapitulate the character of the teaching whereby it might be instilled: generalizations will be approximate at best, and explanations will need to be taken with the sort of 'and so on' which appeals to the cooperation of a hearer who has cottoned on."[82] Moral education will be concerned with inculcating the kind of oretic state characteristic of those we consider virtuous, but as Hursthouse argues, it cannot be taught by memorizing rulebooks. The thought that a moral outlook can be codified stems from what McDowell calls "the avoidance of vertigo" that motivates pictures of value as somehow external to our practices and authoritative over them.[83] By accepting TNC, we are left to grapple with the "colossal difficulty of attaining a capacity to cope clear-sightedly with the ethical reality which *is* part of our world," rather than the fruitless project of locating value outside our world and practices.[84] The acceptance of TNC brings virtue to the fore in ethics; ethics can no longer be seen as the attempt to discern universal rules for ethical action, but rather as the study of certain characters that see the world in a

[82] Ibid, p. 134.
[83] Ibid, p. 139.
[84] Ibid.

distinctive way. Anti-theory serves as a response to MacIntyre's worry about the doctrine of the unity of the virtues because it allows that irresolvable moral dilemmas are not inconceivable. As Hursthouse suggests, there may be cases where two perfectly virtuous agents "have the same 'moral views about everything, up to and including the view that, in this particular case, neither decision is *the* right one, and hence neither is wrong."[85] Conflicts between the virtues needn't be merely apparent, for there is no one decision procedure for producing the good or right action that is rationally justifiable external to our very practice of trying to figure it out.

2. Heidegger and the with-world

In order to understand the relationship between the virtues of justice and self-perfection, it might be helpful to briefly discuss Heidegger's anti-Cartesian, essentially social definition of 'world.' It is in the context of this world that the quests for self-perfection and for justice either cohere or clash. In response to what he saw as Husserl's utter failure to diffuse the problem of solipsism in Meditation V of *Cartesian Meditations*, Heidegger argues that other subjects are not set out against the brute object of the Cartesian world as *res extensa*, but are inextricably tied up in the network of assignment relations that we encounter in our everydayness. The 'being-in' of our 'being-in-the-world' is not only a 'being-alongside' the equipment with which we circumspectively concern ourselves; it is a 'being-with' other Dasein who are implicated in the referential network generated by these tools and the projects for which they are designed. When we encounter the ready-to-hand, "others for whom the 'work' is destined are 'encountered too.'"[86] We encounter a triadic involvement relation between the equipment, its intended use, and its possible user. Heidegger gives a number of examples of this encounter:

> When, for example, we walk along the edge of a field but 'outside it,' the field shows itself as belonging to such-and-such a person, and decently kept up by him; the book we

[85] Hursthouse 1996, p. 198.
[86] Heidegger, p. 153.

> have used was bought at So-and-so's shop and given by such-and-such a person, and so forth. The boat anchored at the shore is assigned in its Being-in-itself to an acquaintance who undertakes voyages with it; but even if it is a 'boat which is strange to us,' it is still indicative of Others.[87]

For Heidegger, the problem of solipsism is simply not a metaphysical or epistemological problem, because he rejects the very notion of worldhood that sees the world as nothing but an extended thing or the sum total of entities. We can make no sense of the entities within the world without a vast network of assignment relations that are encountered through concern for our own equipment use and solicitude for that of others. The world is essentially a *with-world*, Being-in this world is *Being-with*, and the other Dasein we encounter within-the-world are *Dasein-with*.

Heidegger goes on to describe our everyday experience of the Other through a description of how we comport ourselves to our environment "proximally and for the most part." He claims that for the most part we go about our lives without distinguishing ourselves from the others who are encountered in the carrying out of our everyday projects. In perhaps the most famous passage of *Being and Time*, he describes the *they-self*:

> We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as *they* take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as *they* see and judge; likewise we shrink back from the 'great mass' as *they* shrink back; we find 'shocking' what *they* find shocking. The "they," which is nothing definite, and which all are, though not as the sum, prescribes the kind of Being of everydayness.[88]

For the most part, we go about our projects in an absorbed and unthematic fashion without considering ourselves as essentially separate from the Other and her projects. In fact, in our everyday mode of existence, our projects themselves are not distinguished from those of others. My project of, e.g., buying a loaf of bread, becomes at the same time the Other's project of selling me bread. It is only at moments of crisis, when the everyday flow of the "they" has been disturbed, that our projects and our selves become conspicuous and are truly at issue for us.

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[87] Heidegger, pp. 153-4.
[88] Heidegger, p. 164.

3. Justice and cosmopolitanism

In the course of my treatment of the ethical self in the postmodern age, I have suggested that we can make sense of a eudaimonistic ethics without positing a single ahistorical, deterministic, or metaphysical *telos* for human beings as such. In accordance with this pluralistic notion of the *telos* of human activity, I have provisionally redefined eudaimonia as a process through which human selves become ever more articulate and idiosyncratic. I have also described through Heidegger's discussion of the "they" how our everyday projects for the most part intersect with those around us. I now would like to suggest that the project of becoming more self-articulate implicates one in the project of becoming more just, and moreover that the latter project places limits on the former.

In "Virtues and Vices" Philippa Foot says that "justice, in the wide sense in which it is understood in discussions of the cardinal virtues…has to do with that to which someone has a right—that which he is owed in respect of non-interference and positive service."[89] In "Utilitarianism and the Virtues," she discusses the various limits set by the requirements of justice:

> In the first place there are principles of distributive justice which forbid, on the grounds of fairness, the kind of 'doing good' which increases the happiness of rich people at the cost of misery to those who are poor. Secondly there are rules such as truth telling which cannot be broken wherever and whenever welfare would thereby be increased. Thirdly there are considerations about rights, both positive and negative, which limit the action which can be taken for the sake of welfare. Justice is primarily concerned with the following of certain rules of fairness and honest dealing, and with respecting the prohibitions on interference with others, rather than with attachment to any end.[90]

So justice is concerned with non-interference in the projects of others, even when such interference would thereby increase the maximum amount of welfare. This "old" notion of

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[89] Foot, Philippa, 1978, "Virtues and Vices," in S. Darwall (Ed.), *Virtue Ethics* (pp. 105-20), Blackwell Publishing, p. 107.

[90] Foot, Philippa, 1984, "Utilitarianism and the Virtues," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 57: 281.

justice would therefore be unintelligible in a utilitarian ethics; this underscores the respect in which Aristotelian virtue ethics is teleological without being strictly consequentialist.

As we have seen in Heidegger, in our everyday absorbed dealings in the world, our projects are for the most part not distinguished from those of others. The notion of justice therefore has little application in our everyday projects; it is only in moments of crisis, when we are presented with the Other in all his alterity, that justice can place legitimate limits on action. We have seen in Heidegger and others that selves can only be defined in terms of a network of projects and concerns with that exist in both a historical and a social dimension. Any reasons for meaningful action—action not taken out of pure caprice but in the interest of self-building—will necessarily presuppose the projective care that Heidegger discusses as Dasein's unifying element. But since we have seen that all of our projects are part of a vast network of equipment, assignment relations, persons, and their projects, and are only intelligible in terms of this network, our actions can only be meaningful and intelligible with reference to this holistic nexus—the *with-world*.

But how are we to mediate between the demands of justice and of self-perfection in moments of crisis—when the Other and his projects become obstinate, blocking our own progress in self-building? The proper strategy is not to claim, as Aristotle or Kant might, that conflicts between different virtues are always merely apparent; after all, as a constitutive part of the good life, self-perfection must itself be a virtue. Opposition to this strategy is the root of MacIntyre's criticism of Aristotle's doctrine of the unity of the virtues. Similarly, Rorty warns against the "Platonic attempt to hold reality and justice in a single vision." [91] He argues in *Contingency, irony, and solidarity* that "one should try to adjure the temptation to tie in one's moral responsibilities to other people with one's relation to whatever idiosyncratic things or

[91] Rorty, Richard, 1999, "Trotsky and the Wild Orchids," in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (pp. 3-20), p. 13.

persons one loves with all one's heart and soul and mind."[92] Becoming more ethical is not about finding some immutable similarity between all moral agents. We have given up on the notion of humans having an essential nature; the only thing essential to all human beings is that there is nothing essential to any of them. And as anti-theorists, we have given up the hope of finding a totally articulable decision procedure for solving such conflicts. The best we have is the realization that our projects often intersect, and when they don't, we rely upon that Other whose projects butt up against ours to have a good enough moral sense to realize that very few of us can build the kind of self constitutive of the good life without the non-interference and positive service—in a word, justice—of others who are, like us, defined by their "being-in-the-world." It is a precarious balancing act, and one that is wont to cause the kind of anxiety that for Heidegger accompanies our coming into authenticity. We do not have ethical rulebooks to help us in our task; instead, we have a canon of historically appropriate, malleable virtues and the human characters that embody them. It's no wonder that the moral exemplars to whom we look for guidance also have strong, enviable personalities that they maintain in the face of the harshest criticism. And as the lines between societies become ever more blurred, our anxious solicitude with the Other must spiral out correspondingly and become an anxious cosmopolitanism, lest we give up the Aristotelian promise of the good life.

[92] Ibid, p. 13.

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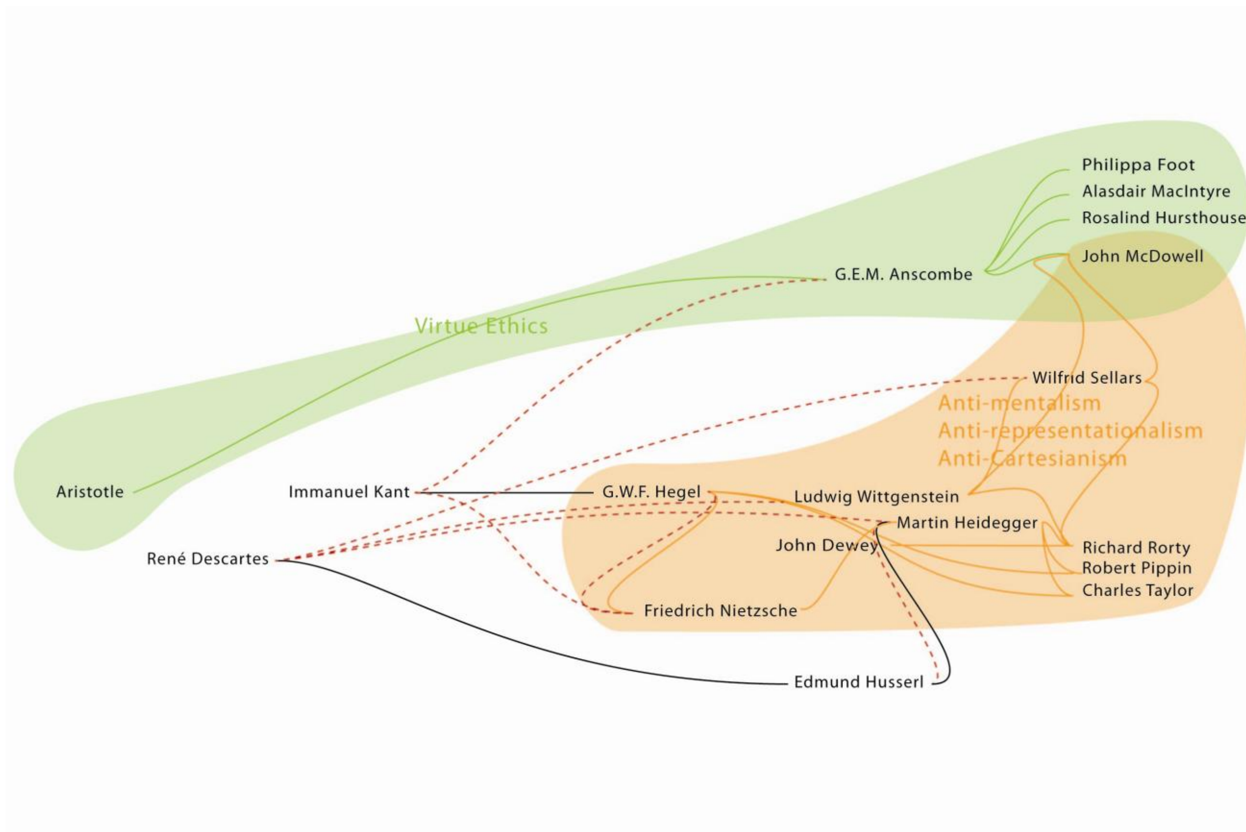
Appendix



Conceptual Map of "Swallowing a World"