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Monographica I
REALISM AND OBJECTIVITY IN ETHICS

MORAL REALISM AND MORAL OBJECTIVITY

GUEST EDITOR'S PREFACE

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The discussion on moral realism and moral objectivity has always been a central issue for moral philosophers. In recent decades, it has been perhaps even more lively than ever. Part of the latest interest in this issue depends on the findings of empirical research, both in evolutionary biology and in neuroscience, that seem to many to provide evidence in favor of skeptical or relativistic attitudes to morality. That this is so is, of course, controversial, and some of the following contributions will provide arguments to question this assumption. Indeed, it can also be doubted that accepting a relativistic framework necessarily implies giving up all kinds of moral objectivity.

That there is a sense in which moral objectivism and moral relativism can be considered compatible is in fact the claim that Filippo Magni sets out to defend in his paper. After distinguishing different meanings both of moral objectivism and of moral relativism, Magni concentrates on meta-ethical relativism, defined as the theory according to which there are conflicting ethical beliefs that are equally valid, or true; and he insists that validity has both the epistemic sense tied to the morally detached perspective of an observer, and the normative sense suitable to the morally engaged perspective of an agent. These distinctions help to see the compatibility of relativism and objectivism. For one thing, some objectivistic moral theories may accept a sort of ethical indeterminacy, that ensures that more than one conclusion is epistemically valid. Moreover, some theories may accept that, although moral principles can be objectively tested for their validity, through the reference to rules and standards for adequate moral systems, these standards are local, and thus different for different groups and societies. In other words, acknowledging the epistemic meaning of 'validity', helps to understand how different moral

principles can be objectively true for different human groups, thus reconciling objectivism and relativism.

A very different stance is taken by Gabriele De Anna, who, starting from Elizabeth Anscombe's idea that an action requires a subject who takes responsibility for it, by giving reasons for it, defends a realistic view of normative reasons. According to De Anna, the content of a reason is not merely a fact, but a fact that is somehow deficient and needs improvement by an intervention that the agent is able to provide. Reality, therefore, is not merely a bundle of facts, but has an intrinsic order calling for completion, and this provides reasons for action. Practical reasons motivate, even though lack of relevant information and failure in subjective responses may frustrate their motivational power. From the subjective point of view, reasons are judged as appropriate or not by reflecting on the imagined responses of a flourishing human being in the same situation; and people, of course, differ in their sensitivity to this normative ideal. The peculiarity of moral reasons, among normative reasons, is that they call for some ways of completing the order of reality, to the exclusion of some other. To account for this peculiar obligation, a conception of what humanity requires in specific circumstances must be introduced; this is a conception of moral objectivity, though seen through the lens of an individual subject.

Some aspects of De Anna's discussion are picked up in Sarah Songhorian's paper, also devoted to discussing the notion of normative reasons for action. Starting from a definition of human action in which reasons feature as an essential element in determining the agent to exercise her causal role, Songhorian focuses on the ontological status of normative reasons. From this perspective, the distinctive feature of moral objectivism, in the different forms in which it actually comes, is to conceive of normative reasons as facts, or as referring to something really existing in the world. Even though we may sometimes fail to have access to these facts, due to our epistemic limitations, normative reasons refer to what objectively ought to be done. Sceptics like Joyce use empirical evidence of human deceit to substantiate the thesis that sees morality as a sort of collective illusion foisted on us by our genes. However, on one hand, their argument does not seem to provide a decisive refutation of moral objectivism, on the other, the upshot of the evolutionary argument against objectivism is the radical debunking of morality. In short, notwithstanding some opinion to the contrary, it is reasonable to foresee that repudiating the moral objectivism of common sense would not leave our moral practices unmodified, but would deprive us of our basic motivation to moral behavior.

The philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe features explicitly also in Sergio Cremaschi's paper, which aims to discuss the second of the three claims of *Modern moral philosophy*: this is the thesis according to which the Kantian 'moral ought' of modern and contemporary moral philosophy depends on a mistaken and outdated law-like conception of ethics, and should therefore be jettisoned. Showing that this critique draws on mistaken assumptions concerning the presuppositions of both Kantian and intuitionist moralities, Cremaschi discusses the kind of metaethical theory that Anscombe is offering, in exchange for the alleged 'moral facts' lying behind the emphatic jargon of 'duty' and 'ought'. His answer is that, notwithstanding her rejection of the strong, 'transcendental' realism of Kantians and intuitionists, she does accept a form of moral realism: this is a naturalistic one, which, however, has not much in common with more recent strands of ethical naturalism and their talk of moral properties, but that accepts, in a Wittgensteinian vein, that the human goods that we refer to in ordinary language are a sufficient basis for objective propositions concerning moral virtues and duties.

Paolo Costa follows on in a similar Wittgensteinian vein, offering a practical, non-representational defence of moral realism. According to him, the receptivity to values and the answerability to moral norms is a basic feature of the life-form of human beings, and is not the result of a representative stance to the world, leading to the discovery of certain *sui generis* facts. Values, in other words, have to do with our sense of reality, with the atmosphere in which we are immersed into all the time, and which cannot become the object of thematic, objective understanding. This sense of moral reality amounts to experiencing the impossibility of moral insensitivity, and to having pre-thematic awareness of being accountable to norms and values that simply cannot be reduced to our preferences. Centering on this basic sense of reality, according to Costa, has 'quietist' consequences, for it dissolves the anxieties that have surrounded the attempt to justify moral facts against the 'scientific view of the world', and helps us to see, in a Darwinian perspective, how the evolution of *Homo sapiens* resulted in the emergence of a new aspect of reality, tied to the space of reasons.

The compatibility of normative (and moral) realism with a Darwinian worldview is the direct object of discussion in Gianfranco Pellegrino's paper. Pellegrino provides a detailed presentation of what is now standardly called the 'evolutionary debunking argument', and offers a way to reject it by questioning two of its premises. According to the argument, in fact, evolution is the only factor determining the content of most of our normative beliefs; now, since beliefs are justified when they track their truth-makers, and since

our normative beliefs would not change in a world in which normative truth-makers were different, authors such as Sharon Street and Richard Joyce conclude that our normative beliefs are systematically kept off-track by evolutionary forces, and are indeed unjustified. Pellegrino's strategy is to challenge the claim according to which evolution uniquely determines the content of our moral beliefs: in particular, the principle according to which there are *prima facie* reasons to impartially pursue the good seems not to have been determined by its effect on our reproductive fitness, and may even be considered counter-adaptive, in certain contexts. This being so, the argument's premise must be reformulated as the claim according to which *some* of our normative beliefs are biased by evolutionary forces. When this is done, the evolutionary debunking argument ends up in threatening moral realism in ways that are no more alarming than the standard skepticism denouncing the mistake of some normative beliefs.

Finally, in my own paper, I attempt a defense of a moderate version of moral realism, according to which moral reality must not be conceived of as a sphere of moral facts existing independently of human existence and reflection; rather, it must be conceived as the set of truths that any human being can accept, when reasoning correctly and without the distraction of irrelevant factors. These truths express moral facts, which are not morally relevant because of the attitude that we take towards them, but are inherently relevant from the moral point of view, and require that we take them into consideration. These facts are relative both to evaluative properties and to deontic properties. Evaluative properties are properties of characters of people that supervene on their psychological traits and dispositions; deontic properties are properties of situations ensuring that some fact about human beings count in favor of a certain action. Normative properties, therefore, emerge from reflectively considering the circumstances and the morally relevant properties observable in them, that is, from taking into account the objective reasons for action. Moral obligation emerges from reflectively endorsing principles that acknowledge the normativity of these reasons. It can thus fairly be said that this approach couples realism about moral facts and properties with constructivism about moral obligation.

Many of the ideas developed in these papers, and the first versions of some of them, were presented at a meeting at the Faculty of Philosophy of San Raffaele University in Milan, in which all the authors took part. This meeting was organised in the context of the PRIN research project 2010-2011 devoted to *Realism and Objectivity*; these papers are part of the deliverables of that project.

OBJECTIVITY AND MORAL RELATIVISM

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ABSTRACT

The relativity of morals has usually been taken as an argument against the objectivity of ethics. However, a more careful analysis can show that there are forms of moral objectivism which have relativistic implications, and that moral relativism can be compatible with the objectivity of ethics. Such an objectivity is not always in contrast to moral relativism and it is possible to be relativists without having to give up the claim of objectivity in ethics

KEYWORDS

Metaethics, relativism, objectivism, disagreement, validity, truth.

1. The relativity of morality has usually been taken as an argument against the objectivity of ethics. According to Mackie's well-known position, moral relativism represents one of the main arguments against moral objectivism:

the argument from relativity has some force – Mackie writes – simply because the actual variations in the moral codes are more readily explained by the hypothesis that they reflect ways of life than by the hypothesis that they express perceptions, most of them seriously inadequate and badly distorted, of objective values¹.

However, a more careful analysis of the concepts involved can show that there are forms of moral objectivism which have relativistic implications, and that moral relativism can be compatible with the objectivity of ethics. Therefore,

¹ Mackie 1978, p. 37.

such an objectivity is not always in contrast to moral relativism and it is possible to be relativists without having to give up the claim of objectivity in ethics.

OBJECTIVITY AND RELATIVITY

2. To start with, some clarification on what we should understand in ethics with objectivity and relativism. In considering a specific moral theory objective we can mean different things.

First, we need to distinguish whether it has to do with objectivity at a meta-ethical level or at a normative level. Normative objectivity refers to the problem of objectivity or relativity of evaluation in relation to the agent's position: the so-called 'positional objectivity', or 'positional relativity' problem for consequentialism, utilitarianism and so on².

But even at a meta-ethical level, the notion of objectivity is not unambiguous, for we can identify different versions. The more general version is a semantic version, according to which moral judgments are objective because they are apt to be true or false like empirical judgments, and they are true (objectivity as truth-aptness).

I use the term 'objectivism' – Giuliano Pontara writes - to refer to any theory on the nature of ethical judgments which implies that such judgments have truth values [...]. Conversely, I use the term "non-objectivism" (where others often use the term "non-cognitivism") to refer to any ethical theory that implies that ethical judgments are neither true nor false³.

Moreover, according to the specific theory of truth held implicitly, objectivity can be related to the presence of a rational method to solve ethical problems, and therefore we can assert that moral judgments are objective because they fulfil such a method (objectivity as rationality). Or objectivity can be related to the correspondence to an independent moral reality, and therefore we can assert that moral judgments are objective if they correspond to such a moral reality (objectivity as reality).

We may distinguish - James Rachels writes - two senses in which ethics might be objective: 1) Ethics could be objective in the sense that moral problems can be solved by rational methods. These methods would show that some moral views are acceptable while others are not. [...] [Or] we may want a theory that makes morality out to be objective in a second, stronger sense: 2) Ethics could be objective in the sense that moral predicates – 'good', 'right' and so on – refer to

² Sen 1983.

³ Pontara 1986, p. 72 (my translation).

real property of things. Moral facts are parts of the fabric of the world. Moral realism is the view that ethics is objective in this sense⁴.

The strongest form of meta-ethical objectivism maintains the claim of objectivity in all these three senses; a weaker version, less related to an ontological point of view, may limit itself to the first two senses.

3. The second question is what relativity of ethics means. Moral relativism is a philosophical view that states that moral judgments are relative to a particular moral code, but with the essential specification that there are more than one alternative moral codes, not reducible to others. This is a philosophical thesis, and not merely an empirical one: it is not limited to the observation of the diversity and variability of moral codes as a matter of fact (the issue of descriptive moral relativism) but aims to support diversity and variability as a matter of principle, since there are good arguments to support them.

However, philosophical moral relativism can be understood in two different ways depending on the level of ethical enquiry: it can be interpreted as if it implies practical conclusions on how we should act (this is the so-called ‘first-level moral relativism’, or ‘normative relativism’); or as if it involves considerations on how moral judgments can be justified and argued for, without direct implications on how we should act (this is the so-called ‘second-level moral relativism’, or ‘meta-ethical relativism’).

Both forms of moral relativism can take different interpretations: in the case of first-level relativism it depends on what practical conclusions we make (isolation, conformism, nihilism, etc.)⁵; in the case of second-level relativism, it depends on how we understand the concepts that appear in its formulation. In what follows, we will focus on the meta-ethical version of relativism.

META-ETHICAL RELATIVISM

4. As for normative moral relativism, for meta-ethical relativism too there are different formulations, and indeed different ways to understand the same formulations. As a general definition we can take the one proposed by David Wong, «no one system of morality is universally valid»⁶, or the definition proposed by Richard Brandt (and Frankena, Harman, Scanlon and so on):

⁴ Rachels 1998, pp. 9 f.

⁵ See Magni 2015, ch. 3.

⁶ Wong 1998, p. 13.

«there are conflicting ethical opinions that can be equally valid»⁷ (the latter formulation is more precise than the former, since denying universality of every moral code does not imply denying that some codes may be more valid than others).

All these definitions use the notion of validity, but it can be replaced with similar notions - with other "cardinal virtues", as Scanlon calls them⁸: i.e. correctness and justification (Brandt and Frankena), appropriateness (Scanlon), acceptability (Postow), authority and credibility (Gowans), rightness (Harman), and finally, more traditionally and commonly, truth - "no moral system is universally true" (an aspect to which we will return). These notions are analogous since all of them may be understood in two different ways, as we will see below.

Therefore, according to meta-ethical relativism, since ethics cannot show which conflicting moral principles are more valid than others, fundamental moral disagreements between individuals, societies, historical periods are not solvable. That is, according to meta-ethical relativism, there are moral disagreements that cannot be solved, even if there were no linguistic confusions and the most extensive and exhaustive empirical information was available. Thus individuals, societies, historical periods may have equally valid conflicting moral principles, and there are no universally valid moral codes, which are valid for everyone in all places and times.

But what does it mean that moral principles can be equally valid? That is, what sense of validity and of the similar notions (correctness, justification, acceptability, appropriateness, etc., the other "cardinal virtues") come into play in these formulations? The answer is not so obvious and indeed deserves some attention.

5. The first distinction to make is the distinction between a normative sense and an epistemic sense of validity (and of the other notions). It is a distinction to which little attention has been paid in moral philosophy, and this fact has often been a source of confusion and misunderstanding; although more attention has been paid in the philosophy of law, in relation to the issue of the validity of legal rules.

In the philosophy of law at least two distinct senses of the validity of a rule are distinguished. In a first sense, a rule is valid when it belongs to a system of rules, is created according to a certain procedure and is not abrogated (if it has what is called a "formal existence"): this first sense is usually called

⁷ Brandt 1959, p. 271.

⁸ Scanlon 1995, p. 143.

"descriptive." In a second sense, on the other hand, a rule is valid when it has a binding force, because it is in itself felt as a prescription. This second sense is usually called "normative". Thus, the sentence that a rule is valid in the normative sense means that the norm plays the role of a prescription, in so far as it claims to be obeyed and applied.

The concept of validity as a binding force - Bulygin writes - is normative in the sense that saying that a norm is valid is not to assert a fact, but to ascribe an obligation to obey the rule in question⁹.

Similarly to the legal validity of a norm, even regarding the validity of a moral principle we can distinguish the epistemic sense of the term, according to which to say that a moral principle is valid is to say that it conforms to an adequate procedure of foundation (or formation, individuation, identification etc.), and the normative sense of validity, according to which to say that a moral principle is valid is to recognize that it has a normative force, because it is accepted as obliging and binding by the agents.

It is therefore necessary to distinguish between normatively endorsing a moral principle and epistemically believing it well-founded, between thinking a principle is in error because morally wrong (moral error) and thinking a principle is in error because inconsistent or wrongly derived (epistemic error).

So if, from a meta-ethical point of view, we consider valid two conflicting judgments, such as 'abortion is right' and 'abortion is wrong', made by two different subjects, Mary and Jane, we mean that both judgments fulfil an adequate procedure of foundation, and therefore Mary and Jane do not commit an epistemic error; similarly, if we say that a judgment such as 'death penalty is wrong' is not universally valid, we mean that it does not always fulfil a procedure of adequate foundation, that is to say, it does not fulfil such a procedure in relation to every agent that makes that judgment, in every spatial and temporal circumstance.

What can be considered an adequate procedure for the foundation of a moral principle depends on which meta-ethical theory is held: as we will see below, it may vary from the reference to nature or to a rational method of reasoning, to the reference to emotions or evaluative attitudes of the agent.

EPISTEMIC VALIDITY

6. In order not to misunderstand the distinction, it should be added that the point of view from which we recognize the epistemic validity is ideally that of

⁹ Bulygin 1987, p. 202 (my translation).

an external observer, an ethical theorist who accepts an appropriate procedure of foundation for moral judgments and assesses whether a particular moral judgment is well-founded. It is not the point of view of moral agents involved in moral agency who make conflicting moral judgments and value the situation differently. Namely, it is the view of an ideal impartial spectator, who tries to avoid his personal evaluation, and puts himself in "a *morally detached* perspective"¹⁰. Instead, regarding normative validity, the view is that of a person involved in the moral evaluation, who judges whether a certain judgment should be morally endorsed, and puts himself in "a *morally engaged* perspective"¹¹.

It should also be pointed out that the term "validity" in the normative sense is used by a first-level relativist as a relative term (to say that something is valid in this sense is to say that it is "valid for..." an individual, a society, etc.)¹²; whereas the term "validity" in the epistemic sense is usually used by a second-level relativist as a non-relative term. That is, normative validity is relative to several standards of validity (which may consist in the decisions of agents, societies, etc.); epistemic validity is instead relative to a single standard (the procedure of foundation deemed adequate); and it is the fulfilment of this procedure, not the procedure itself, that is relative to circumstances and individuals.

To argue that even the epistemic validity should be relative (that even in this sense a moral judgment is valid for ...), would tie meta-ethical relativism to radical forms of cognitive relativism, which refuses the presence of common and inter-subjective standards from which to judge the validity of empirical judgments, and concludes that, from a cognitive point of view, each opinion has the same value. But meta-ethical relativism is not necessarily linked to radical forms of cognitive relativism; indeed, it generally stands as an alternative to them. In fact, it accepts the existence of a common standard (an adequate procedure of foundation for moral judgments) and argues that according to this procedure we can judge when a particular moral judgment is epistemically valid. Thus, for example, according to meta-ethical relativism, if it is plausible to argue that the term 'correct' is relative in the normative judgment 'abortion is correct', it is not plausible in the meta-judgment: "the judgment 'abortion is correct' is correct".

The use of the notion of truth in the formulation of meta-ethical relativism - two conflicting moral judgments are equally true - (instead of validity,

¹⁰ Horgan - Timmons 2006, p. 87.

¹¹ Horgan - Timmons 2006, p. 87.

¹² Stevenson 1961-2.

correctness, justification, etc.), may help to separate the issues of epistemic justification from those of normative justification, since the notion of truth has an obvious epistemic use (to which we will return immediately). But it should be noted that there is also a normative sense of truth, according to which to say that a moral judgment is true means to approve it. Thus if we say "abortion is right" is true', we usually mean that the judgment is epistemically sound, but we could also mean that we endorse it.

VALIDITY AND TRUTH

7. Another distinction equally neglected is the one between different meanings of the epistemic notion of validity, depending on how the adequate procedure of foundation is conceived.

The first meaning relates this procedure to a standard rational method and, according to the standard conception of rationality, for beliefs this method consists in making use of empirical evidence, of inductive inference and of logical-deductive reasoning: the method of scientific knowledge. Only a moral judgment that can fulfil a method of this type can be called 'valid' in the same way that an empirical judgment that fulfils the test of empirical justification can be called 'true'. In so far as we solve empirical disagreements and we judge the truth of two conflicting statements (e.g. 'This room is square' and 'this room is not square') through a procedure of justification which uses empirical observation (measuring the sides of the room, etc.), the use of the standard rational method could solve moral disagreements. Only a moral judgment which is tested by applying a method of this type may thus be called 'valid'.

In this sense, the validity of a moral judgment is subject to very strong epistemic requirements, those that typically identify the notion of truth. The notion of truth is usually connected to more demanding requirements than the other epistemic notions (validity, justification, correctness, acceptability, and so on): the principle of bivalence (according to which every statement is true or false), a relationship with the world (according to which a sentence is true if it corresponds to the facts), stability, absoluteness and so on; conditions accepted by almost all theories of truth, and denied only by strong deflationary views (which identify truth with the other epistemic notions).

In saying that something is true, Crispin Wright notes, we assume:

that to every truth-apt content corresponds a truth-apt negation; that a content is true just in case it corresponds to the facts, depicts things as they are, and so on; that truth and justification are distinct; that truth is absolute - there is no

being more or less true; that truth is stable - if the content is ever true, it always is¹³.

In this sense, the notion of validity is synonymous with that of truth, in a non deflationary sense of the latter concept. And this is the sense in which the term 'validity' has been understood by some non-cognitivists to deny the relativistic implications of their view: relativism (which holds that conflicting moral judgments are equally valid) would be linked to the truth-aptness of moral judgments, denied by non-cognitivists.

It is impossible – Ayer writes - to find a criterion for determining the validity of ethical judgments [...] because they have no objective validity whatsoever. If a sentence makes no statement at all, there is obviously no sense in asking whether what it says is true or false¹⁴.

8. The second sense in which the epistemic notion of validity can be interpreted is in connection with weaker methods of reasoning than the standard one: a moral judgment that fulfils such methods could be said 'valid' even if it does not fulfil the rational standard method.

Many believe that the standard criterion of rationality is not applicable to ethics and stress the peculiarity of moral reasoning with regard to empirical reasoning. As opposed to the standard rational method, they propose less demanding methods of reasoning which are more similar to the different ways to solve moral problems in ordinary life.

Brandt, for example, has replaced the standard rational method with the 'qualified attitude method', according to which a moral judgment is rational if it conforms to the attitudes of fully informed and impartial agents; Rawls and the constructivists with the 'reflective equilibrium method', according to which a moral judgment is rational if it is the result of a conscious weighing and adjustment between specific intuitions and general ethical theories; and Hare with the principle of universalizability, according to which a moral judgment is rational if it can be universalized.

Brandt explicitly refers to this sense of validity in his formulation of meta-ethical relativism: those who argue that two conflicting moral judgments are equally valid are saying, Brandt writes, that

¹³ Wright 1996, pp. 7-8.

¹⁴ Ayer 1936, p. 112.

the application of a "rational" method in ethics would support, equally, two conflicting ethical statements, even if there were available a complete system of factual knowledge¹⁵.

9. Apart from these two meanings of the notion of epistemic validity, we may add a third meaning, according to which a moral judgment is epistemically valid if it conforms to a non-rational procedure of foundation.

What can be considered a non-rational procedure of foundation for a moral judgment depends on the different meta-ethical theories: it may consist in the expression of emotions or evaluative attitudes of the subject (a moral judgment is valid if it is a sincere expression of emotions and evaluative attitudes), or in the reference to intuitive a-priori truth (a moral judgment is valid if it is based on a non-inferential intuition), provided that the appeal to intuitions does not fall within the standard rational method.

Understood in this way, even those who deny that there is a rational method in ethics may consider 'epistemically valid' a moral judgment that fulfils such a procedure. For this reason, Brandt implicitly recognizes that even those who reject such a method (such as non-cognitivists who argue that "there is no unique rational or justified method in ethics"¹⁶) would agree to define "equally valid" conflicting moral principles.

In fact, from a non-cognitivist point of view, Alf Ross acknowledges a validity of moral judgments which is independent from their truth.

It is not *prima facie* unreasonable – Ross writes - to compare the approval of a moral principle with the acceptance of a proposition. Moral approval would on this construction be conceived as an attitude-deciding act in which a moral directive is accepted as valid; and validity is to be taken as a property of directives and consequently independent of the situation in which the directive is experienced and of the person deciding. 'Validity' is thought, on short, to be analogous to truth. [...] Against this interpretation, however, it may be argued that the acceptance of a moral directive is actually constitutive; that is acceptance is a subjective attitude which constitutes the validity of the directives. There exist, according to this view, no specific moral cognition¹⁷.

Therefore, we may have more meanings for the epistemic notion of validity, and therefore more meanings for the sentence that conflicting moral judgments are equally valid: equally valid in a strict sense of the term 'validity' (according to the standard rational method), in a less strict sense (according to

¹⁵ Brandt 1959, p. 274.

¹⁶ Brandt 1959, p. 274.

¹⁷ Ross 1968, p. 63 f.

non-standard reasoning procedures), and in a broad sense (according to a non-rational procedure of foundation).

OBJECTIVISM AND RELATIVISM

10. The distinction between these various meanings of the epistemic notion of validity helps us to show that there are objectivistic views which are compatible not only with first-level relativism (a quite standard view), but even with second-level relativism, and vice-versa, that there are forms of second-level relativism which are compatible with objectivism.

On the one hand, there are theories that maintain the objectivity of ethics in all the three senses that we have seen above but recognize the presence of equally valid conflicting moral judgments. Some cognitivist views stress that ethics has to follow the same rational method as scientific research, but at the same time they acknowledge the possibility of a disagreement not only in fact but also in principle, and therefore admit that there may be conflicting moral judgments which are equally valid in the sense that they would fulfil the standard rational method.

This is because they conceive moral disagreement as similar to the most complex cases of cognitive indeterminacy and vagueness, namely situations where the truth of a judgment is inherently indeterminate (because of the vagueness in the meaning or in the reference of terms) and it would be so even for ideal observers who were aware of all the morally relevant facts: "moral truth may elude our best epistemic efforts"¹⁸. Therefore, some moral disagreements are conceived as similar to the disagreements in relation to unresolvable problems, such as the existence of "agent causation, or abstract entities, or an all-perfect divinity"¹⁹.

The fact that there is no uniquely correct assessment awaiting discovery can appropriately explain why in some cases even idealized agents would fail to converge on the identity of the single best moral evaluation²⁰

Nevertheless, the fact that morality is not completely determined, would not compromise the objectivity of moral knowledge, in the same way as cognitive indeterminacy does not compromise objectivity of scientific knowledge.

Does realism about a discipline – David Brink writes - require that its disputes

¹⁸ Shafer Landau 2003, p. 225.

¹⁹ Shafer Landau 2003, p. 228.

²⁰ Shafer-Landau 1994, p. 336.

be resolvable even in principle? I think that a realist should resist the assumption that it ought to be possible, in practice or even in principle, to get *any* cognizer to hold true beliefs. All our beliefs are revisable, at least in principle, and dialectical investigation of our beliefs can identify explanatory tensions in our beliefs, and force more or less drastic revision in them if it is carried out thoroughly²¹.

11. On the other hand, there are theories that expressly support meta-ethical relativism, but that do not rule out the objectivity of moral judgments, in some of the senses quoted above. They accept the presence of rational methods to address moral disagreements, but these methods cannot solve the problem and cannot say which of two conflicting moral principles is more valid or universally valid.

For instance, Brandt believes that the truth of a moral principle depends on being considered as such by a subject that tests that judgment with his “qualified attitudes”. Yet different people’s qualified attitudes towards the same action may be different so there may be equally valid conflicting moral principles: “the evidence - Brandt writes – rather supports the view that different persons could apply the standard method properly and come out with conflicting answers to *some* ethical questions”²².

Another example is Gilbert Harman’s or David Wong’s meta-ethical theory. According to Wong, moral judgments are truth-apt like factual judgments: the truth of a moral principle depends on following “rules and standards of moral systems that people have developed to resolve internal and interpersonal conflicts”²³, that is, the elements that make up what is an “adequate moral system”. In this way, moral properties can be derived from non-moral properties, and there are moral facts reducible to non-moral facts, precisely through “reference to rules and standards, items in the world that are distinct from moral statements”²⁴. (Nevertheless, Wong refuses to consider his meta-ethics realistic in a strong sense: “by analyzing moral statements as statements about normative structures created by human mind, I am taking the position that there is no irreducible moral reality independent of human invention and choice”²⁵). Yet since the criteria for defining what an adequate system of morality is are local, there are several adequate moral systems with different

²¹ Brink 1989, p. 199.

²² Brandt 1959, p. 293.

²³ Wong 1986, p. 71.

²⁴ Wong 1986, p. 72.

²⁵ Wong 1986, p. 72.

rules and standards according to different moral societies, and there are conflicting moral principles which are equally true.

By allowing for the extension of 'adequate moral system' to vary over different groups and societies, it allows for two sets of moral beliefs that conflict pragmatically to be equally true [...]. It allows for different members of one extension to be applicable to different groups or societies, and this also accounts for some diversity in moral belief²⁶.

The conclusion is shared with Harman: "there is not a single true morality"²⁷.

CONCLUSION

12. Therefore, in ethics, objectivity and relativity can be compatible with each other. Everything depends on the meanings in which the two notions may be understood.

As we have seen, metaethical objectivity means to recognize truth-aptness, rationality and (or) reality of moral judgments. Metaethical relativity means to recognize conflicting moral judgments which are equally valid. On the other hand, we have stressed the epistemic, non-relativistic and not univocal sense of the notion of validity (which may be more or less broad), not to be confused with the normative, relativistic, sense.

These are the most relevant meanings for the notions of objectivism and relativism in meta-ethics, and both are apt to be conceived as complementary rather than opposite.

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²⁶ Wong 1986, p. 65.

²⁷ Wong 2006, p. XII. Harman 2000, pp. 77 ff.

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HUMAN ACTION AND MORAL REALISM

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ABSTRACT

Widely accepted accounts of human action strongly suggest that actions can only be identified from the first personal perspective, i.e. from the point of view of the reasons that motivate an agent. That view has important consequences for moral realism, since it seems to entail that values are subjective: constructivist views of value would then be the only viable accounts of moral experience that does justice to claims of objectivity. This essay suggests that moral realism can still be maintained, if it understood as the existence of a fitness between potentialities existing in reality and volitional powers of well-functioning human agents. On the basis of the acceptance of the first-personal account of reasons for action and of some basic normative intuitions, the essay argues that an agent has to make room for the possibility that the way in which he responds to facts may be inadequate. On the other hand, that is possible – it is argued – if and only if there are correct and incorrect ways of responding to facts, i.e. there are ways in which well-functioning human beings respond to facts

KEYWORDS

Action, good, reasons, constructivism, moral realism, first person, fitness.

1. STARTING FROM ACTION

Debates on realism and objectivity in ethics differ from debates on the same topics in epistemology, since they raise peculiar and difficult issues concerning subjectivity. Subjectivity is certainly implicated also in epistemic acts, both since an epistemic act is carried out by a subject and since such an act is performed on the basis of subjectively chosen reasons. In the domain of ethics, however, subjectivity gains an even greater role. In epistemology, the realist can claim that the true is what it is, regardless of what conditions any subject is in, whereas, in the field of ethics, even the realist must recognise that the good,

or whatever has normative value, must be *practical*, since it must be able to motivate a subject. The very idea of a good that is such regardless of its capacity – at least in principle – to motivate an agent seems incoherent. Aristotle himself claims that all communities originate for the sake of some good, since all men act in view of what *seems good to them*.¹

The importance of subjectivity in ethics gives us a reason to tackle the discussion of realism and objectivity from the point of view of the subject, namely by starting from an analysis of human action and its criteria. This way of proceeding does not mean that one renounces the possibility of offering a theoretical account of the good, i.e. an account which does not consider the point of view of any particular agent and which does not aim at guiding action. The point is that, even in order to grasp from a theoretical point of view what the good is, one must consider that it has the property of guiding action. In this paper, I intend to investigate how the subjective character of the good can be accounted for within a conception of it, which can be still considered realist and objectivist. Since the subjective character of the good depends on its being *practical*, the discussion will have to start from the consideration of human action.

2. HUMAN ACTION AND REASONS

In a previous essay, I suggested that a human action is essentially something that an agent does for a reason. My grounds to make that claim depended on Elizabeth Anscombe's contention that an action is such if there is a subject who owns it and takes responsibility for it. That happens when the agent can answer the question "Why did you do it?" and can do that by giving a reason he had to act (Anscombe, 1957, 9-12). Indeed, the agent would think that the "why did you do it?" question would not apply or he would answer it by giving a cause or a motivation rather than a reason, if he saw the thing he did as not belonging to him and if he felt no responsibility for it.

The view that I just suggested implies that a human action must be rational, and this could seem odd. However, I think that this implication is not implausible, if one considers that rationality here needs not be full. As Robert Audi (2001, 50) pointed out, rationality in action can come in different degrees. The highest degrees involve a commitment to finding out truth and doing the good. Lower degrees can involve a mere consonance with reason. The lowest degrees concern what Audi calls minimal rationality, the condition

¹ Aristotle, *Politics* 1252a, 1-3.

of someone who lacks most epistemic virtues but at least is not insane, and to that extent can own his doings and be held responsible for them. All that I have to say seems to me to hold for an action regardless of the degree of rationality that that action implies.

In my view, reasons for action need to have an objective and a subjective side. They need an objective side, since a reason involves normally a fact. (In making this claim I follow only partially Raz, according to whom reasons are facts (Raz 1975, 16-19), but I will say more about this below). The fact that the beggar is hungry is a reason to give him food. However, reasons need a subjective side, since they have to be practical, as we have seen. I am dissatisfied with attempts to deal with this problem that distinguish two parts or two components of reasons for action, typically a belief and a desire or some other pro-attitude (Davidson 1963). My dissatisfaction is due to the fact that these views imply that if one holds the belief that ϕ -ing is morally obligatory but one fails to desire to ϕ , then one does not have a reason to ϕ . In my view, this implication fails to account for our moral discourse, according to which one's belief that ϕ -ing is morally obligatory certainly gives one a reason to ϕ , even if this requires frustrating one's desires. Rather than taking a reason to be the conjunction of two elements, a subjective element (a desire or another pro-attitude) and an objective element (a content-bearing belief), I propose to account for the subjective and the objective sides of reasons at once. I take the two sides to be aspects of the same thing, while holding on to the intuition that a reason always implies both some content and an attitude towards that content (Audi 2010). How can one do that?

My proposal is to consider that the content of a reason for action is not simply a fact, as Raz proposed, although it normally involves also at least one fact. The content of a reason involves a fact but also an unrealised state of affairs, which depends somehow on that fact and which the agent believes himself to be able to actualise. The agent must see the fact as representing some goodness, or some positive value, but also as needing an improvement (i.e., the yet unrealised state of things that is connected to the fact), and he must see that improvement as something that he can bring about. John sees Mark starving, and the fact that Mark is starving can be a reason for John to give him a sandwich. But it is a reason to do so only if John sees Mark or his life as a good, his starvation as a deficiency to be settled and himself as having the power to do something about it. If John thinks Mark is vicious and deserves to starve, Mark's starvation is not a reason to feed him. If John respects Mark and his life but he thinks that Mark needs to lose weight for his good, Mark's starvation is no reason to feed him. If John sees the worth of

Mark and his starvation as a problem to be solved, but he is conscious that he cannot do anything about it, he has no reason to do anything. In short, that there are reasons for action implies that an agent sees reality as having some order in it – an order that is somehow incomplete and deficient and needs to be improved – and that the agent sees herself as having the powers required to improve the partially existing order.

The upshot of my proposal is that one can recognise reality as having an intrinsic order, which calls for completion and furnishes reasons for action, if and only if reality is not conceived as a mere bundle of facts, but as a bundle of facts, which have proper ways of perfection and which can solicit a subject to respond to its deficiency. I call “good” any fact and any yet unrealised state of affairs that contribute to constitute some reason. This notion of the good keeps the objective and the subjective aspects of reasons for action together.

Reasons that explain actions are motivational: that means that an agent sees them as normative, i.e. that she sees them as indicating what she should do, regardless of what desires she has.

3. NORMATIVE REASONS, OBJECTIVITY AND PRACTICAL REALISM

So far I have claimed that reasons explain action and that at least some of the reasons that explain actions are motivational for the agent, i.e. they are seen by her as normative. That only means, however, that those reasons seem good to the agent, not that *they are really so*. Motivational reasons might not be normative. One may not do what one has (normative) reasons to do, or do what one has (normative) reasons not to do. “Why did you hit that man?” “Well, he looked pretty rich, and I wanted to get his wallet: I need money”. A perfectly understandable reason is given as an answer to the why-question. The agent seems rational, and in fact he owns his action and is responsible for it: if there is a failure here, as it seems, we cannot blame it to rationality². At the same time, however, if she sees reasons for action where there are actually none, that failure must be (at least) also rational: if it cannot be a case of irrationality, it must be a case of limited rationality. She fails in the exercise of her powers, also her rational powers.

The practical reason of an agent could have two main kinds of limitations. There can be cognitive limitations and limitations in the adequacy of subjective responses. On the one hand, indeed, an agent could have cognitive

² Cf. Vogler 2002, Chs. 1 and 7; Audi 2001 and 2010, 275-285.

limitations, which do not allow him to access all the relevant facts subsisting in the world. I understand cognitive limitations in a wide sense, including also the mere lack of information, which can be completely non-culpable. Since our grasp of the world is limited, we humans are always subject to this kind of limitations, even if their degree can vary considerably. On the other hand, there are limitations in subjective responses in the sense that a subject can consider normative reasons which are not so or non-normative reasons which are instead so, even if he has all the relevant information. The point is that he responds in an inadequate manner to the order that he can recognise in reality, on the ground of the information, which is available to him. Let us imagine two men, Tony and Jeff, who are at a party and see a plate full of cash lying on a table near the sandwiches. "Maybe the money is here for the guests!", they comment, and they grab a hand full each. Let us slightly rewind and enter the possible world in which, before they extend their hands on the cash, Dominic says "Gosh, this is the cash that we have collected for the charity before: I wonder who left it here". Now, let us imagine that, on the basis of this information, Tony takes his hand back, whereas Jeff goes on and makes a handy large also in this possible world. This example seems to justify the distinction between cognitive limitations and limitations of the subjective response. In the world in which the agents lack information about the origin of the money they behave in the same way, whereas in the world where they have fuller information their actions diverge. Tony responds by changing his intention, whereas Jeff does not: he turns out to be insensitive to the reasons of private property. He does not lack information, but we still see his response as problematic, since we think that the way in which he thinks proper to complete the partially existing order (the order concerning the existence of money and conventions about its distribution, for example) is not really a completion, but even a kind of further dissolution. Hence, an agent can be motivated by an inadequate reason because of a lack of information or because, even if he has all the information needed to be motivated by normative reasons, he does not respond as he should to the facts that he considers in his deliberative processes.

Can we say anything about the inadequacy of subjective responses? The issue of the limitations of practical reason is complicated, since it cuts across different issues in moral psychology. As we noted, practical reason guides action, but it does that through complex interactions with other cognitive and volitional faculties. Practical reason can guide processes of reasoning and deliberation, which can concern either the consideration of singular reasons or the comparison among different competing reasons. Practical reason can

involve no reasoning, but only insight. Practical reason can operate on habits, which are acquired through education and social life (the subject matter of virtue theory), and on desires. Practical reason can interact with consciousness and with freedom. Because of its complex relations, practical reasons can fail in many ways: that means that there are many ways, in which an agent can act differently from what the best reasons to him available suggest.

We cannot discuss all those complex relations here, but a full treatment of them would be needed for a full understanding of the distinction between cognitive limitations and the response-limitations of practical reason. Two problems about the notion of limitations in subjective responses need to be addressed here, though. They are general problems, in the sense that they arise regardless of whether cognitive or volitional capacity is involved in the relation with practical reason. The first problem is whether there really are failures of response, which might not be imputed to a lack of information. The second problem is on the basis of what criterion, granted that there are limitations of response, which do not depend on lack of information, can we claim that a response is a failure, if no incompleteness or falsity of content is involved.

Let us consider the first problem. In order to press the objection that gives rise to it, let us further consider the example of Tony and Jeff, who found cash on a table at a party. We could ask what influenced the failure of Jeff's response. A possible scenario is that Jeff tends to undervalue charity, due to the influence of his father, who followed Spencer's views on the treatment of the poor. He despises charity to the point that he is blind to the fact that an act of torpedoing a charitable initiative can be a theft. In this case, a certain habit conditions the response, by shaping the way in which the new information is elaborated and interpreted, in the light of information that is already held. The limitation of the response, in this case, can be reduced to a cognitive limitation: an act of theft is not recognised for what it is. In this case practical reason itself fails, since an event, a theft, is not recognised for what it is. Let us imagine a second possibility: Jeff did not respond in the right way and took the money, since he deliberately performed the action describing it as the taking of the property of others. However, he does not believe that there is anything wrong in taking the property of others, since he grew up in a commune and has never reflected on the social importance of private property and its respect. In this case, the lack of a proper response also possibly depends on a cognitive failure: if Jeff were to think carefully about the importance of private property, maybe he would start responding properly to information akin to that of the example. Also in this case, practical reason itself fails: unlike before,

it does not fail to recognise to what kind a certain event belongs, but it fails to achieve a decent level of coherence among beliefs, due to the influence of habits developed during the process of growth of the agent. This kind of examples suggests the objection that we are considering: maybe all failures of response are reducible to lack of information, i.e. to cognitive deficiencies.

There are counterexamples, however, which show that such a reduction is not always possible. Let us imagine another scenario. Jeff is fully aware that taking money would be a theft; he knows that thefts are unacceptable, and he is aware that his reputation would be ruined if his friends new that he did something like that. However, he has a strong desire to take the money, since he really wants to buy a certain pair of trousers and he lacks the resources. He tries to resist, but when he realises that no one is looking at him and that he would not pay with his reputation for that action, he gives up and does it. We would agree that he failed, but, in this case, we cannot reduce his failure to a cognitive fiasco. The failure, in this case, has to do with Jeff's incapacity to control his desires through his reason.

Let us now turn to the second problem. The examples that we have just considered aim only at suggesting that there are aspects of our experience, which justify a distinction between limitations of our practical reason due to epistemic deficiencies and others depending on failures in the response. If all the failures of response could be reduced to insufficiencies in the information available to the agent, we could draw extreme conclusions about objectivity and realism in the practical domain. Reasons would be strongly objective, since they would be totally determined by their contents. Furthermore, in that case, practical reality would be made of an order that subjects can recognise and of predetermined forms of completion of that order. On the other hand, if the differences among responses depend on differences among the subjects, which cannot be reduced to differences in the information they have, then the hopes of practical objectivity and practical realism are less certain. In case of lack of information, we can make sense of the distinction between proper and improper responses in counterfactual terms: a proper response is one that the subject would have given, if he had full information. However, if we assume that an agent has full information, how can we make sense of his failing to respond? This is the second problem that we have to face.

The example of Jeff stealing money under the pressure of a strong desire seems to suggest an easy way out: Response-failures that are not dependent on information depend maybe on a clash between practical reason and other cognitive and volitional faculties. They are cases in which – as we are assuming – reason is fully functioning from a cognitive point of view, but it fails to rule

other faculties, which should be subject to it. However, this solution does not work, since it relies on features of the example that not all cases of failure under full information share. Let us imagine a further modification of our example. Jeff knows all he needs to know about the situation and recognises that taking the money would be stealing; furthermore, he has no strong desire to get the money. Still, he does it.

There are two possibilities here. The first possibility is that he recognises that stealing is wrong, and still does not act accordingly. He has and sees reasons not to take the money, but ignores them, although he is not under the pressure of contrasting desires or other interfering attitudes. In that case, he is irrational (Broome 2015). But there is a second case: he recognises that taking the money is stealing, but he thinks there is nothing wrong with it. The first case is not very troublesome: we can imagine the agent apologising or recognising that he did something wrong. It is a case of failure of practical reason, in an agent who is generally rational. The second case, however, constitutes a problem for realism and objectivity: it suggests that an agent with a fully functioning rationality could have all the relevant information and still fail to respond. This is a challenge for realism and objectivity, since one can ask: “why shall we say that Jeff in that case *failed* at all?”

The point of the challenge is that information – even when complete – can underdetermine what it is right to do. The thesis that there is a partially realised order in reality presupposes that what exists grounds potentialities, which an agent must actualise. However, of course, actualities bear potentialities, which can be actualised in many, incompatible ways. One can respond to a beggar asking for help by giving him money or by turning away, in the sense that both courses of action are viable in the situation. What makes some ways of responding right/correct/acceptable and others wrong/incorrect/unacceptable? If disagreement about what the correct response is continues also in epistemically ideal situations, e.g., when agents have and properly understand all the relevant information, on what grounds can one claim that there are objective criteria to judge which responses are correct and which are not? Or that there are values – broadly understood – in reality? How can one suggest that there are normatively relevant facts, which can be criteria for our practical judgements, as I did above?

It seems to me that the challenge of the second problem can be met. Let us recall that we are considering the standpoint of the agent, and that we need a solution that takes that standpoint in account. Let us consider how the problem arises. We have a strong intuition that certain actions like stealing or killing an innocent or not helping someone in need are wrong and that

someone who does them rationally must be responding to the wrong reasons (let us call it “normative intuition”). Then we can consider that no information about reality, no objective fact can settle the question for the agent and be a criterion to rule out unacceptable reasons. But sure we cannot give up our normative intuition and conclude that anything goes. If there must be constraints and they cannot come from objective facts or from reality, they must come from the subject himself. The way seems open to constructivist solutions and no hope seems left for realism. However, this result can be overthrown if we consider what constraints can come from the subject and if we consider the point of view of the agent which practical philosophy requires and that we endorse here.

From the point of view of the agent, the normative intuition that generates the problem takes this form: “fact f seems to me a reason to ϕ , but is it really so?” Our normative intuition is that one could be wrong in responding to situations in certain ways, and from the first-personal point of view that looks like a doubt concerning the correctness of one’s response. The point is that a subject can think that his response to a situation must not necessarily be correct and that the reasons that seem normative to him might not be so. That thought, however, is not a doubt about facts, but it is a doubt about the correct way of *responding to facts*. This means that the doubt amounts to asking oneself how an ideal agent would respond in the same situation. I will say more about the sense of ‘ideal agent’ in this sentence. For now suffice it to say that it is not an idealised subject, but a normal human being who functions well from both the cognitive and the volitional point of view. In practical situations, this can be a concrete person, as for example someone that the agent may trust and consider as flourishing.

All this means that, from the point view of the agent, the criteria that constrain his reason and save our normative intuition do indeed come from the subject, as the constructivist would have it. However, they do not come from the subject in the sense that they flow spontaneously from the agent, or from a transcendental structure of his practical reason. Rather they come from the comparison with the imagined responses of a flourishing human being who were to find himself in the same situation. This means that the agent sees his constraints in a matching between the normative structures of the world and a human subject, whose volition functions well: some ways of being of subjects and consequently some ways of responding by them are appropriate and others are not. On the other hand, not all human beings can be equally sensitive to normative reality. This gives an unexpected realist twist to the argument.

At this point, however, one has the problem of explaining the magic pre-set harmony between subjects, who respond correctly, and the order existing in reality. The position that has just been suggested is that the world has a normative structure and that that structure matches the volitional structure of “well-functioning” human agents. Where does this matching come from? The agent can follow this way of reasoning only if she can account for that harmony, by recognising a teleological structure of reality. That can be explained theologically, or through a form of non-reductive naturalism (Foot 2001 and Nagel 2011) or on an evolutionary basis (Casebeer 2003). This line of thinking is challenged by the objections of evolutionary moral sceptics: I believe that their objections are instructive, even if, in the end, not decisive, but I cannot argue for this point here.

4. FROM PRACTICAL REALISM TO MORAL REALISM

So far, I have been discussing the practical domain and reasons in general, not the moral domain. Sometimes I have used the word ‘moral’, but that was not for the sake of clarifying that term: it was only to offer examples of normativity, without any concern for what is special about morality. What I have been suggesting holds for the reasons we have to buy a nice painting, to play a nice piece of music, to go for a walk, or to choose a career. It holds for all that we do, in general. Moral actions and moral reasons are subsets of those that we have so far considered, but they are significant subsets, from the point of view of objectivity and realism.

The main difference between moral and non-moral normative practical reasons is that the moral imply an obligation that the non-moral ones lack. In a sense, non-moral normative reasons also indicate what one *ought* to do, but this is a weak sense of ‘ought:’ their indications can be ignored simply by ruling out an assumption on which they rest. The assumption might concern a certain result that one may want to attain, or being a certain kind of person that one wants to be. “If you want to play that passage on the violin well, you must study it in separate stings”. That statement might give Tony a normative reason to study the passage in separate strings. Tony could also decide not to study the piece that contains that passage at all, however. “If you want to be the kind of person who is always invited to parties, you *ought* to wear brand cloths and always smile”. Good, but if I *do not want* to be that kind of person I *can* avoid doing those things.

In the case of moral normative reasons, by contrast, obligation is stronger. “If you want to help that person who is starving you can give her a piece of

your sandwich.” If Tony said that he has no interest in helping that person – provided that he is the only one who can do it, and all other necessary amendments – we would think that he is not as justified as he was when he decided not to practice a certain passage on the violin in separate strings. “If you do not want to be a liar, you must avoid saying even small lies”. The answer “I do not care about not being a liar” does not seem as acceptable as the answer “I do not care about not going to parties.”

We can observe that some moral obligations are stronger than others. Some are so strong that they become even legal obligations: their violation cannot be tolerated and legitimate authorities can punish who violates them: “do not kill”, “do not steal”, etc. Here I will not deal with this distinction among different degrees of obligation of moral reasons and discuss only the distinction between moral and non-moral normative practical reasons.

Moral normative reasons are problematic from the point of view of realism and objectivity since they seem to request a stronger normative constraint in reality, than is required by non-moral normative reasons. Let us consider our previous example: “if you want to play that passage you must study it in separate strings”. Let us imagine that this is a genuine reason: it is true that the given order (i.e. the technical level of the player, the characteristics of the piece and so on) calls for a completion of a certain kind (studying in separate strings). That order, however, can be completed also in other ways, for example by studying an easier, but equally pleasant piece. The existing order calls for a response from the agent, but there is more than one way to complete that order and the subject can respond in many different ways.

When we deal with moral reasons, it seems that, among all possible ways of completing an order, some might be necessary and others might be unacceptable. That does not mean that a certain variety is not possible, but the stronger force of moral obligation seems to depend on the fact that in these examples there is a limitation in the range of viable possibilities for completing an order that in the case of non-moral normative reasons does not hold.

On what does this limitation depend? In the case of non-moral normative reasons, there is a range of open possibilities for the completion of an order – which may include also the option of leaving things as they are. The choice about which form the completion of order should take is left to the subjective response of the agent (regardless of the fact that the subjective response can depend from differences in information or not). In the case of moral reasons, by contrast, it seems that a certain response (or at least one of the responses in a certain set) must be given by whoever happens to be in a certain situation. The response (or a set of possible responses) is obligatory in the sense that it is

requested from anyone, regardless of the subjective characteristics of the agent. The point is that in non-moral normative reasons the obligation is conditional upon the assumption of the intention to be a certain kind of agent or of choosing a certain kind of end. In the case of moral normative reasons, the obligation holds regardless of the kind of person that an agent wants to be and the kind of ends that the agent wants to attain.

We have seen above, while discussing non-moral normative reasons, that an agent can always ask himself whether the reasons that seem normative to him are really such and that that question can take the form of a question about what a person whom the agent trusts and respects would do in a similar concrete circumstance. It is natural to expect that the chosen person may be a concrete or an ideal person, who in a certain way paradigmatically exemplifies the kind of person that the agent wants to be or who fully realises certain ends that he has chosen. In the case of moral reasons, the criterion can no longer be a (concrete or ideal) person of a kind to which the agent belongs: the question then is how any man would respond in the given circumstances, i.e. a man who can be fully counted among humans. I do not think here of a point of view of humanity. It is rather the point of view of a concrete man who has all and only the qualities that make him a well flourishing human, i.e. someone who chooses not on the ground of belonging to a certain specific category, but only under the generic assumption that he is human.

For the point of view of an agent who chooses, then, asking whether those which seem to one moral normative reasons are really such, means asking what is human in the concrete given circumstances and reasoning to this question means asking – in an intensional sense – what being human means.

This conclusion allows me to note that moral reasons limit the range of possibilities open to agents more than non-moral normative reasons, since they are more objective: the limitation is operated by a criterion that requires the recognition of what is human and the intuition of how humans can become in different conditions in which their lives can be realised. Let us remember that from the beginning we are reasoning from the point of view of the agent, i.e. of a subject who chooses what to do and how to do it: when an agent asks himself whether the reasons that seem normative to him are really such, he will never reach an absolute point of view. Even if he decided to follow some moral authority, this choice would still depend on reasons that he sees as such and thus the point of view that he could reach would not be absolute. It is a corollary that the moral objectivity and realism that we have reached is not absolute. However, the points I argued for still show, it seems to me, that an agent cannot but commit himself to what seems objective and real to him, i.e.

to the order that he recognises and to what being human means. I believe that his commitment is indeed absolute.

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WHY SHOULD I BE MORAL? THE IMPACT OF OBJECTIVISM OR NON-OBJECTIVISM ON OUR COMMONSENSICAL UNDERSTANDING OF NORMATIVE REASONS FOR ACTION¹

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to see what kind of implications would an objectivist or a non-objectivist response to the research of a foundation for moral normativity have on our commonsensical usage of moral terms and on our ability to justify our moral action through normative reasons (1.). In order to see the implications of objectivists and non-objectivists perspectives, I will focus on how normative reasons ground and justify moral actions from a first-person perspective (2.).

From an objectivist viewpoint, reasons can be conceived of as referring to what objectively ought to be done. From a non-objectivist viewpoint, on the other hand, if we claim that there are no grounds to justify our moral beliefs that something is right or wrong, then either we believe the normative level is a beneficial illusion that will survive scepticism at the metaethical level, or we take this scepticism to debunk morality entirely (3.).

KEYWORDS

Normativity, reasons for action, objectivism, non-objectivism, folk morality.

1. NORMATIVE MORAL CLAIMS

When we refer to moral concepts we take them to be *normative* and to make *claims* on us (Korsgaard 1996, p. 8). It is basically for this reason that our

¹ This paper is an attempt to systematize some points made to a previous version of Gabriele De Anna's paper in this volume.

moral disputes are so harsh – much more than our disputes about etiquette or taste. When we encounter someone we disagree with on moral grounds, we usually do not rest content with the idea that it is a matter of different perspectives, we argue in favour of our position trying to convince that other person that there are *good reasons* for endorsing our perspective. For instance, if we disagree on whether death penalty is right or wrong, we usually do not accept that it is a matter of taste or of different cultural perspectives, on the contrary, we believe that one of us is right and there is actually something that *ought* to be done.

If one recognizes these features of our ordinary moral discourse – and some relativists or expressivists may not –, then the question has to be: where does this normativity come from? We need to understand why moral claims exercise such a power over us and why we believe there is something that actually ought to be done.

in ethics, the question can become urgent, for the day will come, for most of us, when what morality commands, obliges, or recommends is *hard*: that we share decisions with people whose intelligence or integrity don't inspire our confidence; that we assume grave responsibilities to which we feel inadequate; that we sacrifice our lives, or voluntarily relinquish what makes them sweet. And then the question - *why?* - will press, and rightly so. Why should I be moral? (Korsgaard 1996, p. 9).

Many moral theories have tried to answer this question – that is, to provide a foundation for normativity in ethics. The aim of this paper will not be to provide a decisive argument for any of the possible solutions, but rather to group them into two types – objectivists responses and non-objectivists one – and to try and see the implications they might have on our ordinary usage of moral concepts. I will focus only on the implications for acting upon what we believe are moral standards from a first-person perspective.

2. ACTION AND REASONS

Our commonsensical usage of moral concepts refers basically to two main domains: on the one hand, we use moral concepts to judge something to be morally good or bad, just or unjust; and, on the other, we can act morally or not.

Obviously, moral judgments and moral actions bear reciprocal influences and their relation is far more complicated than I can depict here. However, for this paper it will suffice to focus on the role two kinds of foundation of the

normativity we seem to trace down in the moral discourse have on the way we experience morality from a first-person perspective.

I will try here to take seriously Korsgaard's question – why should I be moral? – and to see what consequences an objectivist or a non-objectivist account of the foundation of normativity might have for moral agents.

Action differ from mere bodily movements because of their explicit intentionality (for an analysis of the concept of “intention” see Anscombe 1957; De Anna 2012a). There is a difference between grabbing a cup of coffee and involuntary moving my head or moving my body because I was pushed. The literature on how to define an action is extensive (for a review, see Wilson, Shpall 2012), but here it will suffice to underline a few intuitive difference. When I act, as opposed to when I simply move my body, I intend to do something, to bring about a consequence or to reach a goal. Probably when I grab a cup of coffee, I intend to drink it with the goal of benefitting from its stimulant effects. I know that I want to bring about something and I have a certain amount of control over what I am doing. Whereas, when someone pushes me and my body is moved, all these activities, this active engagement, are not present. I do not intend anything, nor I have a previous knowledge or a cognitive control over what I am doing – I may have a minimal motor control, so that I can stop my movement before I fall to the ground, but it is a control of a different sort. Similarly, when I involuntary move my head, I am not aware of what is going on, at least not in the “full-blooded” sense in which I am aware when I decide to do something.

Even if one is convinced by this reading of what an action actually is, problems may arise when we try to define a specific subset of actions, that is moral ones. The question may, thus, be: what is the feature of a moral action that makes it different from other kinds of actions?

A possible and tempting way to answer this question is to say that moral actions are those that have consequences to others. I ought to help others in distress and I ought not to use them as means to my own ends. These are certainly clear cases of moral actions affecting others that I ought or ought not to do and yet the issue is not so easily settled. Firstly, not all moral actions or omissions have consequences for, or regard others: there might be self-regarding duties that need to be taken into account. Secondly, there are cultural differences, what might seem amoral from a specific perspective, might be considered moral from another. Greeting someone by kissing his or her cheeks in public might be an issue of etiquette deprived of any moral significance in some cultures, while in others it might be not only revolting, but immoral (Edmonds 2014, p. 109). For these reasons, it is hard to draw the

line between amoral actions and morally relevant ones, since it is hard to find a criterion or a threshold to distinguish them, apart from very clear cases. The difference between grabbing a cup of coffee and harming a stranger for no reason is a clear case were we distinguish between a moral content and its absence. But things are not always so simple.

A more promising attempt to define the subset we are interested in – that is, moral action – is by means of the concept of “reasons”. When I help someone in despair I do it for a reason, that is, there is something that justifies or explains my action. A reason for acting, in Scanlon’s terms, is “a consideration that counts in favor of it” (Scanlon 1998, p. 17). Although it might seem very similar to the concept of “intention”, the concept of “reasons” bears a heavier burden. It is not only that I want something to happen – as for intentions that can be amoral and particularistic –, when I claim to have a reason for acting that way, I am appealing to rationality, or at least to reasonableness. I claim that my considerations for doing X are not idiosyncratic, but on the contrary can be at least understood by others, if not even shared and endorsed by them.

These reasons seem to *motivate* our actions and seem to have that *normative* force that makes claims on us. They might be the kind of entities that hold that special feature for which Korsgaard wants to find a foundation.

If we do speak in this way, of motivating and normative reasons, this should not be taken to suggest that there are two sorts of reason, the sort that motivate and the sort that are good. There are not. There are just two questions that we use the single notion of a reason to answer. When I call a reason “motivating”, all that I am doing is issuing a reminder that the focus of our attention is on matters of motivation, for the moment. When I call it “normative”, again all that I am doing is stressing that we are currently thinking about whether it is a good reason, one that favours acting in the way proposed (Dancy 2000, pp. 2–3).

As Dancy pointed out, it is not that there are two distinct sets of reasons – i.e. motivating ones and normative ones –, they are one and the same. The difference lies in the aspect we want to underline.

At this point a working definition of what an action of the relevant type seems to be can be provided.

X is A’s action (of the relevant kind) if and only if:

- (1) X is the exercise of a causal role;
- (2) A holds that causal role;
- (3) A is responsible for the realization of X;
- (4) A intends X or X is the means for A’s goal;
- (5) A has control over X;

- (6) A is determined to do X by means of reasons;
- (7) Reasons for X are accessible to A before performing X;
- (8) X has a moral content (its reasons refer to moral norms).

Obviously, condition 8) is yet too vague. We do have a sort of intuitive understanding of what it means for an action to have a moral content and yet we cannot rest content with such a definition because of its underdetermination in unclear cases. If certain practices appear amoral in one place and, on the contrary, seem to have a moral content in another, who is right? How do we know for sure that certain things pertain to the moral domain while others do not? Unfortunately, I cannot deepen these questions or try to provide answers to them. They will remain open.

Normative and motivating reasons are crucial to understand human moral action and in particular to try and answer Korsgaard's question about the foundation of this normative force we experience from a first-person perspective.

In quoting Dancy's account of normative and motivating reasons not as two different sets of things but rather as two ways of posing questions, I have assumed a specific version of reasons internalism, that is not universally accepted.

A common and plausible view is that to be an agent's motivating reason for acting, a consideration has to be something which that agent takes to be a normative reason for acting (Dancy 2000; see Setiya 2007 for objections). At the very least, it seems that it must be possible for an agent to be motivated by her normative reasons (Nagel 1970). This possibility is in tension with the commonly drawn distinction between motivating reasons as psychological states and normative reasons as facts or propositions (Smith 1994), which places these types of reasons in different ontological categories (Finlay, Schroeder 2015).

I will not get into details about the debate on reasons internalism as opposed to reasons externalism even though it is an extremely relevant one (for a review of the literature, see Finlay, Schroeder 2015). What I will be considering in the next section is the ontological status of reasons. I will deal with the consequences for our commonsensical understanding of morality from a first-person perspective of believing that there is something objective to which reasons refer, as opposed to believing that there is not.

3. OBJECTIVISM ABOUT REASONS VS. NON-OBJECTIVISM ABOUT REASONS

Until relatively recently, the distinction between different kinds of reasons was assumed, whether explicitly or not, to imply that these reasons were things of different kinds. Normative reasons were conceived of as facts, and so were regarded as mind-independent: the facts are what they are independently of whether anyone knows them or thinks about them. By contrast, motivating and explanatory reasons were conceived of as mental states of agents and, as such, as entities which depend on someone's thinking or believing certain things (Audi 2001 and Mele 2003 are representative examples—but see also Mele 2013). In recent years, however, this assumption has been challenged, giving rise to a number of disputes about the ontology of reasons—that is, disputes about what kind of thing or things reasons are (Alvarez 2016).

Focusing on normative reasons, one may wonder what kind of things can reasons be. A common claim, both among moral philosophers and in our commonsensical understanding of morality, is that they are facts (Alvarez 2016; Raz 1975; Scanlon 1998), that there is something in the world to which normative reasons refer. This account is obviously debated and is complicated by the subsequent question about what kind of facts they can actually be. Moral facts can be conceived of as facts pertaining to a real ontological set of things, as properties of empirical facts that supervene onto them, as facts in a constructivist sense, or as reducible to empirical facts. Obviously, different ontological accounts follow from these alternative views.

Without entering the minefield of these ontological accounts and without committing to any of these alternatives – whether one is a realist about moral facts or moral properties or a constructivist, for instance –, what some versions of these perspectives can share is the belief that reasons refer to facts and that the latter are objective.

According to this account, there is something objective to which our reasons for acting refer to and that makes them normative. When we act upon reasons, thus, we refer – or try to refer – to what *objectively ought to be done*.

There are various ways in which we can fail to refer to properly normative reasons. We might fail to recognize the relevant features of a given situation, or we can misrepresent what we ought to do in certain contexts. For this reason, by providing reasons for our behaviour we only try to refer to what objectively ought to be done. However, these failures to refer to what ought to be done are not – from this perspective – due to the inexistence of something objective about morality, but rather to our epistemic limitations in accessing it.

The fact that we are sometimes wrong about what the right is, or about the reasons justifying it, is not an objection to the objectivists, in as much as they can ascribe those failures to human limitations.

As a guide for action from a first-person perspective – that is, as an answer to Korsgaard’s question – objectivist accounts provide a pretty straightforward answer. The foundation of the normativity we perceive in morality is objective; reasons for action refer to it. As already mentioned, accounts can differ in as much as what ought to be done can be conceived of as a set of real entities – like physical one –, as properties of things, or as the result of a construction. However, besides ontological differences, what all these alternative views share is the kind of answer to the foundation of our normative reasons for acting from a first-person perspective.

This objectivist view is usually implied in our commonsensical understanding of moral normativity.

There is obviously another possibility: one can be a sceptic about moral objectivity. A recent development of this position can be found in *Evolutionary Metaethical Scepticism* (EMES; for a discussion, see De Anna 2012b; Joyce 2006; Ruse 2006). Joyce (2006) and Ruse’s (2006) metaethical positions are deeply influenced by Mackie’s *error theory* (Mackie 1977). According to Mackie, our moral language is construed as if there were objective moral entities, as if there were truth-makers for moral terms, but there is actually nothing like them. All moral statements are, according to Mackie, false, even though they might be a useful illusion. To reach this conclusion, Mackie used two well-known arguments: the *argument from relativity* and the *argument from queerness* (Mackie 1977, pp. 36–42).

Joyce takes on Mackie’s metaethics. According to his view, recent developments in evolutionary theory should be taken as showing that moral capacities have been selected because they increase fitness regardless of their truth dependency (De Anna 2012b, p. 212). He claims that there is a striking difference between moral beliefs and doxastic ones: the former can be beneficial to fitness even though they are not truth-dependent, whereas the latter cannot. A similar claim can be found also in Ruse, who maintains that “morality is a collective illusion foisted upon us by our genes” (Ruse 1986, p. 253).

In order to show that morality is subject to illusions, Joyce provides a few empirical examples. He mentions, for instance, Kahnemann and Tversky’s *framing effect* on the *Asian disease* (Kahnemann, Tversky 1979). People are usually deceived by how a certain scenario is depicted – specifically, when deciding about the life and death of 600 people, subjects tend to respond differently when the choice is described as “saving 200 people” or as “letting 400 people die”. The problem with this kind of data is twofold. Firstly, the fact that we can actually be subject to illusions does not prove *per se* that morality

is an overall illusion. It might be, also from an objectivist perspective, that we sometimes get things wrong without this meaning that we can never get them right. Relying on this evidence to debunk our confidence in our moral capacities is like relying on visual illusions to claim that we should never trust what we see. There are obviously cases in which we make mistakes, but that is no guarantee that we never get things right. Secondly, cases like the one Joyce mentions are precisely cases where people cannot provide reasons for their choices. They “feel” the right choice is one or the other, but they cannot justify why they made such a differential choice. If our minimal criterion for assessing whether an action is morally justified is that the agent can provide good reasons for it – reasons that are understandable and sharable by others, and that count as normative and motivating reasons –, then data from occurrences in which subjects are not able to provide reasons cannot be considered relevant to discredit morality by claiming it is an illusion. In order to achieve such aim, one needs to show that, even when we believe we have very good reasons – that are not only sharable and understandable by others, but are actually shared and understood by them –, we do not in fact.

Leaving for now these difficulties aside, let me focus on the thesis Joyce wants to defend. As De Anna nicely puts it:

The upshot is that our moral capacities are not a reliable process for the formation of true moral beliefs. Therefore, we have no way to know whether any and, in case, which of our moral beliefs are true: we have to suspend our judgement about each of them. This is scepticism in the old, classical sense: “no moral judgements are epistemically justified” (Joyce 2006, 224). It is worth noting that Joyce’s view is ultimately slightly different from Mackie’s. According to Mackie, our moral statements are systematically false. According to EMES, i.e. Joyce, we cannot have any justification for the truth of moral claims. They could be true, but there is no way to find out whether they are true or false (Joyce 2006, 223) (De Anna 2012b, p. 213).

Now the question would be: how does this sceptical perspective influence our everyday use of moral concepts? Is there a way to maintain that no moral judgment is epistemically justified and yet that we have to keep relying on moral judgments as we usually do?

According to Mackie, we can still use the moral jargon even though all moral statements are false:

what I am discussing is a second order view, a view about the status of moral values and the nature of moral valuing, about where and how they fit in the world. These first and second order views are not merely distinct but completely independent: one could be a second order moral sceptic without being a first order one, or again the other way around (Mackie 1977, p. 16).

Similarly, Ruse claims that:

once we recognize [that there is no justification for morality], we see the sentiments as illusory – although, because we objectify, it is very difficult to recognize this fact. That is why I am fairly confident that my having told you of this fact will not now mean that you will go off and rape and pillage, because you now know that there is no objective morality (Ruse 2006, p. 23).

So, according to these views, moral behaviour could still be possible even if one holds metaethical scepticism. But is it really so?

If what makes an action a moral one is the possibility for the agent of justifying it through normative reasons and if those reasons do not refer to anything that can be conceived of as objective, then what should ground our moral behaviour? Why should I be moral if I do not know whether what I believe ought to be done is true or false? I rather suspend all judgments on what I ought to do since I cannot tell whether they are grounded or not. If morality is an illusion beneficial for fitness and if I do not know in any given case whether my actions would enhance fitness or not, it simply seems to be no ground to grant moral behaviour.

Joyce seems to make a similar point:

if your thinking on some matter presents itself as a faithful representation of the world but in fact there are no grounds for supposing that it is, then, by epistemic standards, its being undermined is a *good* thing (Joyce 2006, p. 222).

If Joyce is right, claiming that no moral judgment is justified leads to debunking morality entirely. Scepticism runs, thus, from the metaethical level to the normative one.

From the agent's perspective, there would be no grounds to believe that his or her reasons for acting are good. One may claim that in very clear cases – like murdering an innocent without gaining by this action any other positive consequence – individuals would recognize what is beneficial for fitness and so will actually be able to behave in a moral way even without objectivism. But firstly, we have very little understanding of what fitness might require: is it so clear that killing an innocent would be detrimental for fitness in any given context? Secondly, even if, for the sake of the argument, we accept that this explanation might work in clear cases, morality concerns rarely only such easy cases.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this paper was to see what kind of implication would an objectivist or a non-objectivist response to Korsgaard's research of a foundation to moral normativity have on our commonsensical usage of moral terms and on our ability to justify our moral action through normative reasons.

I have limited the discussion to a few general claims from both sides. In particular, as far as non-objectivists' perspectives are concerned, many other accounts could be considered, but I have chosen to discuss EMES for its relevance in the current literature.

In order to see the implications of objectivist and non-objectivist perspectives, I have focused on how normative reasons ground and justify moral actions from a first-person perspective.

From an objectivist viewpoint, reasons can be conceived of as referring to what objectively ought to be done. This is usually how our commonsensical understanding of morality accounts for what we do when we act or judge morally: we refer to what actually ought to be done.

Certainly agents can fail to understand what they actually ought to do in certain contexts, but that is no evidence in favour of the inexistence of something objective in morality. It is rather proof that we have some epistemic limitations in accessing what ought to be done.

From a non-objectivist viewpoint, on the other hand, if we claim that there are no grounds to justify our moral beliefs that something is right or wrong – that is, if we are metaethical sceptics –, then either we believe the normative level is a beneficial illusion that will survive scepticism on the metaethical level (Mackie, Ruse), or we take this scepticism to debunk morality entirely (Joyce).

In either case it seems difficult to understand where an agent should find grounds to act morally. If our normative reasons do not refer to anything objective, then inaction seems to be the most likely consequence (provided we know there are no grounds for our moral beliefs). In case ordinary individuals would not know that there are no grounds for justifying their moral beliefs, then they might go on considering them objective even if they are not. This possibility resembles elitist utilitarianism: moral practice would, thus, be detached from moral knowledge of our basis for justifying it.

In conclusion, moral objectivism seems to be the easiest way to account for ordinary moral practice, whereas moral non-objectivism would either lead to the necessity to keep the true basis of moral beliefs a secret or to the inability to act morally from a first-person perspective.

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ANSCOMBE ON THE MESMERIC FORCE OF ‘OUGHT’ AND A SPURIOUS KIND OF MORAL REALISM

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ABSTRACT

I discuss the second of the three theses advanced by Anscombe in ‘Modern Moral Philosophy’. The focus is the nature of entities to which – if Anscombe’s diagnosis is correct – ought and cognate modals are assumed by modern moral philosophers to refer. I reconstruct the alternative account offered by Anscombe of viable and justified ‘Aristotelian’ modals – as contrasted with mysterious and unjustified ‘Kantian’ modals; I discuss the nature and status of ‘Aristotelian necessity’ to which such legitimate modals refer to. I conclude with the claims that Anscombe’s account of modern moral philosophy is viciously parochial, reducing it to Oxford philosophy from the Thirties and Forties and its immediate antecedents; that her historical reconstruction is vitiated by lack of awareness of the existence of law-views of morality preceding Christian theology, artful anticipation of secularization in order to fit her picture of modern moral philosophy as the ‘day after’ of Christianity; that Aquinas’s and her own view of natural morality as made of rational moral judgments laws is incompatible with both her predilection for ‘divine law’ instead of plain down-to-earth ‘natural law’; that her strained reconstruction of a Christian-Jewish-Stoic view of morality as law promulgated by God has little to share with any reconstruction of the Biblical moral traditions meeting academic standard and in more detail there is no possible translation of *Torah* as *Law*; and that her criticism hits just targets from the old little British world she was familiar with, while leaving Kantian ethics unaffected.

KEYWORDS

Moral realism, naturalism, naturalistic fallacy, is-ought, virtue ethics, Kantian ethics, Aristotelian ethics, Arthur Schopenhauer, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Peter Geach, Philippa Foot.

1. ANSCOMBE'S THREE THESES

Anscombe's work is a crossroad from which various alleys in contemporary ethics and related subjects depart: action theory, moral psychology, neo-naturalism, virtue ethics, so-called divine-command theory (in fact a theory with many critics and virtually no proponent), and yet, the discussion about precisely what kind of ethical theory Anscombe supported is still yielding a flow of literature. My pre-comprehension, not argued in this chapter, is that Anscombe is not a proponent of virtue ethics, an ethical theory where the most important concept is that of virtue, but instead the discoverer of an astonishingly simple idea, namely that morality is no more a simple phenomenon with its own essence than several other phenomena in human life. Ethics is inherently a theory of the complexity of human action. As O'Brien aptly summarizes, her critique of modern ethics points at an alternative

picture of ethics in which neither virtues, consequences, nor rules serve a more basic explanatory role than the others. She is a pluralist about ethical categories, which implies that virtues, consequences, and rules answer to complementary and mutually implicating explanatory needs. A human action may be bad either if it springs from a vicious disposition, produces certain bad consequences, or violates a rule; it can be good only by avoiding all of these pitfalls¹.

“Modern moral philosophy”, her famous 1958 essay, is an attack on ethical theories from Butler up to Ross and Hare², claiming that there is a shared approach to moral issues in this tradition and this is not the only possible one, and besides that the disappointing state of the art in moral philosophy depends on a few mistaken assumptions. These are: a) forgetfulness of dispositions or virtues, b) unjustified primacy of rules and obligation, c) denial of the existence of classes of absolutely forbidden actions. Anscombe's essay defends three theses: the first is that a satisfactory “philosophy of psychology” is required before we may start doing ethics in any profitable way; the second claims that the force of “moral obligation and moral duty” arises from oblivion of its origin; the third declares that consequentialism, the claim that the moral value of actions depends on their consequences and accordingly *any* kind of

¹ M.B. O'Brien, “On Obligation and the Virtues of Law” in L. Gormally, D.A. Jones, R. Teichmann, *The Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2016) 75-97, pp. 75-76.

² In fact by “modern” moral philosophy she means no more than early twentieth-century Oxford philosophy with its predecessors. Cf S. Cremaschi, “Elizabeth Anscombe on Consequentialism and Absolute Prohibitions”, *Danish Yearbook of Philosophy*, 47 (2012) 7-39, pp. 10-18.

action may be examined as a possibly admissible or dutiful kind of action, is the mark of all contemporary kinds of Anglo-Saxon ethics after Sidgwick³.

2. FORGETFULNESS AND THE GENEALOGY OF MORALS

I discuss here a point related mainly to the second thesis, namely what kind of realm of alleged moral facts lies behind the mysterious moral ought, and what kind of objective reality lies at the basis of ethics understood in an admissible sense. In a word, what kind of moral realism is implied by Anscombe's 'naturalism'.

The thesis claims that the force of ought arises from forgetfulness of its origins and accordingly the moral sense of 'ought' and cognate concepts are "survivals, or derivatives from survivals", from an earlier conception of ethics. To have "a *law* conception of ethics" one should assume that "what is needed for conformity with the virtues" is required by divine law and – she adds – "it is not possible to have such a conception unless you believe in God as a law-giver; like Jews, Stoics and Christians"⁴, but, "if such a conception is dominant for many centuries, and then is given up, it is a natural result that the concepts of 'obligation', of being bound or required as by a law, should remain though they had lost their root"⁵. Thus, modern moral philosophy is an unstable building. Its basic concepts, such as those of duty and obligation and the moral ought – never occur in Aristotle. They are instead relics left by another conception, centred on the idea of divine law, which "was found among the Stoics, and became generally current through Christianity, whose ethical notions come from the Torah"⁶. Anscombe's proposal is

using ought in a non-emphatic fashion, and not in a special 'moral' sense; of discarding the term 'wrong' in a 'moral sense', and using such notions as 'unjust'⁷.

³ G.E.M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy", in *Human Life, Action and Ethics*, ed. by M. Geach and L. Gormally (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2005) 169-94, p. 169, on the first thesis of S. Cremaschi, "Anscombe on the philosophy of psychology as propaedeutic to ethics", in M. Galletti (ed.) *La mente morale. Persone, ragioni, virtù* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2014) pp. 17-62; on the third S. Cremaschi, "Elizabeth Anscombe on Consequentialism and Absolute Prohibitions".

⁴ G.E.M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy", p. 176

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention* (1957) (Cambridge, MASS: Harvard University Press) 2000, fn 1.

⁷ G.E.M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy", p. 188.

Anscombe's story about forgetfulness may have sounded a bit weird to mid-twentieth century Oxford ears, but would have sounded more familiar to anybody conversant with nineteenth-century German philosophy. There had been in Germany a strand of reflection on the role of oblivion in the life of mind, inspired by the Romantic reaction against early-modern cult of mnemotechniques⁸, a strand to which Schopenhauer had given a decisive contribution. He was impressed by Rousseau's remarks about the role of forgetfulness in the process of learning. It is well-known how *Èmile* was not expected by his tutor to learn anything by hearth. His early medical interests concentrating on mental illness lead Schopenhauer in *The World as Will and Representation*, book III, § 36, to formulate the diagnosis that "madness is a disease affecting particularly memory"⁹ creating gaps in the patient's memory, which are filled up in turn with fantastic representations. The disease itself was a reaction to unbearable pain, a means of forgetting what was too painful to the patient. In the Supplements to book I, ch. 14 he adds that in healthy minds too most mental processes are constantly forgotten, that is, the processing of raw materials received from outside takes place "in the darken depth and is carried out as unconsciously as the transformation of food into bodily humours and substance"¹⁰.

In Feuerbach we meet speculations about the history of the European modern mind, suggesting that the values of modern Europe were a Christian legacy somehow secularized though oblivion of the originally religious character of such values, and Nietzsche seems to draw inspiration from both Feuerbach and Schopenhauer when he writes that what makes institutions, norms and values appear to be justified beyond any doubt is a result of a process through which their original justification is forgotten; modern civilization is just secularised Christianity, and humanists and socialists are priests in drag¹¹. In *On the Foundation of Morality* Schopenhauer had argued, against Kant, that to assume the existence of moral laws is tantamount to a *petitio principii*. The only true meaning of 'law' is that of a human institution based on human arbitrary will, and derived, metaphorical sense is that of natural law. The only law really existing for human will is "the law of motivation, an instance of the law of causality, namely causality mediated by

⁸ Cf H. Weinrich, "Vergessen, das", in J. Ritter and K. Gründer (eds.) *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, 12 vols. (Basel: Schwabe, 1971-2004) cols. 671-675.

⁹ A. Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (1819) in *Sämtliche Werke*, 7 vols., ed. by A. Hübscher (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1937-1961) vol. II: 226 (translations are mine).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. III: 148.

¹¹ F. Nietzsche, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches II* (1886) in *Sämtliche Werke*, 15 vols., ed. by G. Colli and M. Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980) vol. IV\3: § 40.

knowledge”¹², and, “for the introduction into ethics of the notions of law, prescription and ought, there is no other origin than one extraneous to philosophy, namely Moses’s Decalogue”¹³, “there is no doubt that philosophical ethics has been unconsciously moulded by theological ethics”¹⁴, and Kant “tacitly and stealthily borrowed this imperative kind of ethics from theological Morals”¹⁵.

The young Wittgenstein’s ethical views followed closely Schopenhauer’s philosophy¹⁶. Ethics – he declares – belongs, together with religion and aesthetics, to the ‘mystical’, a domain outside the ‘world’ or the ‘totality of facts’. Language is able just to describe the world and “*In* it there is no value – and if there were, it would be of no value”¹⁷. Values “lie outside of the world”¹⁸. This is the reason why “there can be no ethical proposition”¹⁹. To give a fuller picture, we should also consider the *Lecture on ethics* of 1930 where changes introduced in those years in his philosophy are reflected. It is well-known that the binary alternative between descriptive use of language and the impossible attempt to use language in order to mention what is outside the world, he admitted a plurality of meanings depending on the use we make of linguistic expressions. This carried the possibility of a distinction between relative value judgments and absolute value judgements according to which “every judgment of relative value is a mere statement of facts and can therefore be put in such a form that it loses all the appearance of a judgment of value”²⁰, while “no statement of fact can ever be, or imply, a judgment of *absolute* value”²¹. What is still true to the philosophy of the *Tractatus* is the idea that ethical propositions, even though propositions of a paradoxical kind are in a strict sense meaningless. This is their “peculiar essence” in so far as by them we try “to go beyond the world, that is, beyond meaningful language”, and ethics “in

¹² A. Schopenhauer, *Über die Grundlage der Moral*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. IV: 121.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 122

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

¹⁶ On Wittgenstein’s Schopenhauerism cf. A. S. Janik, “Schopenhauer and the early Wittgenstein”, *Philosophical Studies*, 15 (1966) 76-95; E.S. Morris, “Schopenhauer’s impact on Wittgenstein”, *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 7 (1969) 285-302; M. Micheletti, *Lo schopenhauerismo di Ludwig Wittgenstein* (Padova: La Garangola, 1973); B. Magee, *The philosophy of Schopenhauer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, second edition 1998) pp. 310-40.

¹⁷ L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) (Routledge: London 1961) 6.41

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 6.42, 6.421.

²⁰ L. Wittgenstein, *Lecture on Ethics*, ed. by E. Zamuner, E.V. Di Lascio, and D.K. Levy (London: Wiley Blackwell, 2014) pp. 44.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

so far as it springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable can be no science”²².

And this is the position in which, for example, someone finds himself when he looks for definitions in ethics or aesthetics that correspond to our concepts.

In this sort of predicament, always ask yourself: How did we learn the meaning of this word (‘good’ for instance)? From what sort of examples? In what language-games? Then it will be easier for you to see that the word must have a family of meanings²³.

The same holds for the word ‘good’, Moore’s Troy-horse for his final assault on naturalistic and metaphysical ethics. His discovery of a unique meaning attached to the word is simply a blunder, for

it could be said that the use of the word ‘good’ (in an ethical sense) is a combination of a very large number of interrelated games, each of them as it were a facet of the use. What makes a single concept here is precisely the connection, the relationship, between these facets²⁴.

The only way to ‘define’ the word ‘good’ is by providing examples where use is made of the terms. We always find some closeness, contiguity, familiarity among elements of the series, what is not tantamount to any element shared by all its elements. That is, there may be

nothing in common between the two ends of the series. The way in which you use ‘good’ in particular case is partly defined by the topic you’re talking of. Each way in which A can convince B that x is good, fixes a meaning in which ‘good’ is used – fixes the grammar of the discussion [...] Nothing would be more astounding, than if ‘good’ had the same meaning always, considering the ways we learn it. So it may be very difficult to find anything in common between two uses of ‘good’, but there will be gradual transitions from one to the other, which take the place of something in common²⁵.

Thus, at the time of the *Philosophical Investigations*, he still viewed ethics as the adoption of a framework within which we may ‘see’ that life has a

²² *Ibid.*, p. 51.

²³ L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. by P.M.S. Hacker and J. Schulte (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, 4th ed.) § 77.

²⁴ L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*, ed. by R. Rhees and A. Kenny (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974) p. 36.

²⁵ *Wittgenstein: Lectures, Cambridge 1930-1933. From the Notes of G. E. Moore*, ed. by G. Citron, B. Rogers, and D.G. Stern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016) May 5 1933; cf. D.G. Stern, “Wittgenstein's Lectures on Ethics, Cambridge 1933”, *Wittgenstein Studien*, 4 (2013) 191-206.

meaning, and thus still as coextensive with religion and aesthetics. In fact he still writes sentences like from his earlier phase, for example: "If anything is good, then it is also godly. My own ethics may summarized in this way, even though in a somewhat queer way"²⁶. But he is also aware now that there are a number of ways and senses in which we may discuss issues from a moral point of view, and no essence or definition is needed in order to be able to recognize the ethical dimension at stake.

Coming back to Anscombe, the Wittgensteinian mood in which the second thesis was formulated should be kept in mind in order not to mistake the meaning buried in a rather cryptic formulation. The thesis is one more example of a consistent strategy consisting in trying to deflate a number of philosophical problems by showing how concepts are no more than networks of 'similar' ideas and the point of philosophy as a practice is precisely dissolving non-existent essences and self-contained concepts from whose use traditional philosophical problems arise; and after that there is no different philosophical solution to be put forth, but we come back to plain ordinary language comprehension of issues depurated from misunderstandings and everybody will see how things are. In other words, what Anscombe had in mind is that Moral Philosophy rests on a mistake.

It is as well to add that, even though the substance of the second thesis comes from Schopenhauer via Wittgenstein, Anscombe might have never read anything by Schopenhauer and just have heard directly from Wittgenstein the story about forgetfulness as the source of the moral law's force²⁷. Roger Crisp reports a private communication by Peter Geach, her husband, to the effect that "as far as he knows, Anscombe had little direct knowledge of Schopenhauer's work, but that he and Wittgenstein would certainly have talked to her about Schopenhauer"²⁸. It is true that an English translation was available of *On the basis of Morality*²⁹ but no direct reference is found in Anscombe's writings.

²⁶ L. Wittgenstein, *Bemerkungen über die Farben; über Gewissheit; Zettel; Vermischte Bemerkungen* (Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp, 1990, p. 454 (the translation is mine).

²⁷ Ch. Pigden, "Anscombe on 'Ought'", *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 38, no. 150 (1988) 20-41, pp. 32-33; R. Crisp, "Does Modern Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?", in A. O'Hear (ed.) *Modern Moral Philosophy. Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement n. 54* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 75-94, pp. 77-78.

²⁸ R. Crisp, "Does Modern Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?", p. 77 fn 7; P. Geach, *The Virtues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) discusses Schopenhauer at pp. 28, 30-32, 144, 148-149, more often than other more obvious authorities on the subject.

²⁹ A. Schopenhauer, *The Basis of Morality*, tr. with intr. and notes by A.B. Bullock (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co, 1903).

3. ANSCOMBE AND WITTGENSTEIN ON ETHICS AND LANGUAGE

Anscombe was well-aware of both the distance between Wittgenstein and Logical Empiricism as well as of his Schopenhauerism. And in fact, in “Modern Moral Philosophy” she puts to work effectively the lesson from the *Philosophical Investigations* that essences are a delusion and that there “may be nothing in common between the two ends of the series” exemplifying uses of words when dismantling the mysterious emphatic *ought* following the strategy adopted by Wittgenstein for *good*.

One of the first points she makes in ethics, in *Intention*, is that ‘should’, which may be assumed to render Aristotle’s $\delta\epsilon\tilde{\iota}$, is a “rather light word with an unlimited context of application”. The list of examples she gives is that

athletes should keep in training, pregnant women watch their weight, film stars their publicity, that one should brush one’s teeth, that one should (not) be fastidious about one’s pleasures, that one should (not) tell ‘necessary’ lies, that chairmen in discussion should tactfully suppress irrelevancies, that someone learning arithmetic should practise a certain neatness, that machinery needs lubrication, that meals ought to be punctual, that we should (not) see the methods of ‘Linguistic analysis’ in Aristotle’s philosophy³⁰.

The point she is making is that there is nothing specifically ethical in such use, as there is nothing necessarily ethical in Aristotle’s idea of a practical syllogism. Both have to do with practical knowledge, not ethics. The set of examples introduced by Anscombe is probably understood as one of Wittgenstein’s series of terms constituting ‘families’ bound together just by ‘family resemblances’, where there is nothing in common between the two ends of the series. Yet “the ordinary (and quite indispensable) terms ‘should’, ‘needs’, ‘ought’, ‘must’”³¹ are used in meaningful ways in everyday life and might be correctly used also when discussing ethical questions if depurated from a sort of deposit of further unjustified ‘meaning’. In order to better grasp the point of Anscombe’s account of the meaning of “ought”, it is necessary to mention Philippa Foot’s account of “good” in “Moral Arguments”. Her claim is that descriptive terms such as mendacious, unchaste, unjust might be used instead of “bad” and they would not raise the same troubles³². Note that Foot was carrying out a careful criticism of Moore’s naturalistic fallacy argument, sharply contrasting with Anscombe’s parallel but somewhat expeditious

³⁰ G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention*, p. 64.

³¹ G.E.M. Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy”, p. 175.

³² Ph. Foot, “Moral Arguments” (1958) in *Virtues and Vices* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002) 96-109.

refutation of Hume's law carried out in a few lines of "Modern Moral Philosophy".

Before discussing Anscombe on Hume, let me compare the athletes-and-pregnant women example quoted above with a well-known passage from the *Philosophical Investigations*. Here Wittgenstein declares: "What *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use"³³. What Anscombe wants to do is taking such terms as 'should', 'needs', 'ought', 'must' and doing with them what Wittgenstein recommended for such words as 'knowledge', 'being', 'object', 'I', namely, instead of trying to grasp the essence of the thing as philosophers delude themselves into doing, "always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language which is its original home?"³⁴. Following this lead, I would suggest that she was trying here to do for the word 'ought' what Wittgenstein had tried to do for the word 'good'. The latter had Moore in mind – in fact, he had him sitting in flesh and bones in his classroom in the Thirties and was trying to undo his argument for the impossibility to define 'good'. Anscombe, instead, had Hare as an opponent, and was trying to pay him the same favour as regards his thesis of the original character of prescription, or the impossibility of any shift from 'is' to 'ought'.

The implication of her argument is that there is no special philosophical problem behind such terms as 'should', 'needs', 'ought', 'must', and that propositions where they occur only formulate ethical questions when they refer to virtues and vices, goodness or wickedness of human actions, passions and dispositions. She writes:

All human action *in concreto* is either good or bad *simpliciter*. There is no need to insert 'morally' and say 'morally good or bad'. The term 'moral' adds no sense to the phrase, because we are talking about human actions, and the 'moral' goodness of an action is nothing but its goodness as a human action. I mean: the goodness with which it is a good action³⁵.

Thus, the 'mesmeric force' of the word 'ought' in modern moral philosophy is superadded and unnecessary.

While writing the above remarks, Anscombe was aware of Wittgenstein's considerations on ethics as well as of his dependence on Schopenhauer. Indeed one of her books is among the first sources we have on Wittgenstein's

³³ L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §116

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ G.E.M. Anscombe, "Action, Intention and 'Double Effect'" (1981) in *Human Life, Action and Ethics*, ed. by M. Geach and L. Gormally (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2005) pp. 207-26, p. 212.

Schopenhauerism³⁶. In her commentary to the *Tractatus* she recalls Wittgenstein's view according to which, since there is no *logical* connection between the will and the world, such connection must be a purely *accidental* one. She adds that this consideration had a bearing on his ideas about ethics. The point is that the will, as it appears in the world, is a mere phenomenon only of interest to psychology, while if

I were suddenly so paralysed that nothing happened, the will would remain – I should still have willed; but this will is not merely an impotent thought of the thing's happening, but it is good or evil [...] But of that we cannot speak because value lies outside the world and can only express what is *in* the world. Now [...] had he only been concerned with the fact that 'good' and 'evil' could not fit into the picture theory, he might have done as many positivists did, and debunked value altogether³⁷.

And later on, she adds that

'action', in the ethical sense, is something independent of what happens; and this is the bearer of good and evil. Thus the 'will that is the bearer of the ethical' (*Tractatus*, 6.423) belongs among the transcendentals of the *Tractatus*, along with the mystical and the meaning of life³⁸.

Peter Geach had written that the 'most serious misinterpretation' by the first Italian translator of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* had been that 'the mysticism of the *Tractatus* is regarded not as anything integral to Wittgenstein's thought but as an illogical reaction against the irrationally self-imposed limits of a narrow positivistic philosophy'³⁹ while the truth is, instead, that 'the *Tractatus* is full of Schopenhauerian theses and ideas'⁴⁰.

To sum up, Anscombe's second thesis sounds like Nietzsche's genealogy of morals turned upside down. Instead of claiming, like Nietzsche, that modern humanism is a kind of *implicit* theology and that it should take the final step toward true Atheism, she argues, on the contrary, that modern humanism is a kind of *confused* theology. I will illustrate how the main way out of confusion she proposes – which I would call her official moral ontology – is *not* a return to theology but a way back to a *natural morality* that, on principle, can do without theology. There is a second way she proposes at the meantime – which

³⁶ G.E.M. Anscombe, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus* (London: Hutchinson, 1959) 11-12, 169.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

³⁹ P. Geach, Review of Colombo's translation of the *Tractatus*, *The Philosophical Review*, 66/4 (1957) 556-559, p. 558.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

I would call her semi-official moral ontology – and this is theism with a divine law-giver. Occasional rather infelicitous expressions that have been duly used by critics for attacking her as one more proponent of a divine-command morality or of extreme voluntarism. It is fair to remark that, taking it at its best, the contents of such divine-law ethics overlap *completely* with those of what would be a sound secular morality, that is, one dispensing with the emphatic *ought* and focusing instead on the norm as a model, needs, virtues and inbuilt rules of language games. And yet, even such semi-official moral ontology based on a divine law-giver is both irremediably flawed and unnecessary in any *philosophical* discussion of morality.

4. ANSCOMBE ON THE EMPTY MORAL OUGHT

Anscombe admits that Hume did point out some interesting characteristics in the is-ought connection thus doing “a considerable service by showing that no content could be found in the notion ‘morally ought’”⁴¹. Rules in themselves are fully comprehensible within the context of practices and institutions, but this does not mean that they carry the force of moral obligation.

What is *not* a real philosophical problem is the transition from *is* to *ought*. The term ought could be a totally harmless term when used within one language game and we would learn how to use it by entering the language game itself. But its necessity in, say, the promising game, depends on considerations of a different kind. She writes:

What is this necessity? The answer is given only by describing the procedure, the language-game, which as far as concerns the ‘necessity’ expressed in it does not differ from this one: I say ping and have to say pong [...] There is clearly no answer to ‘Why do I have to?’ [...] But if the procedure has the role of an instrument in people’s attainment of so many of the goods of common life, the necessity that people should both actually adopt the procedure, i.e. often give undertakings; and also go along with the procedure, i.e. tend to accept the necessity expressed in that reaction and treat it as a rule – this necessity is a necessity of a quite different sort: it is the necessity that Aristotle spoke of, by which something is called necessary if without it good cannot be attained⁴².

In the light of this example we are expected to be able to ‘see’ a viable sense of the notion of ‘duty’ and cognate modals (‘should’, ‘you’d better’, ‘obligation’, ‘must’ etc.) as opposed to the *law* or *command* sense inadvertently preserved in

⁴¹ G.E.M. Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy”, p. 179.

⁴² G.E.M. Anscombe, “On Promising and its Justice” (1969) in *Ethics, Religion and Politics* 10-21, p. 19.

the received meaning (or better ‘force’) of these modals, those that Diamond proposes to call ‘Kantian modals’⁴³. Anscombe’s alternative is based instead on ‘Aristotelian modals’, namely expressions that may be lexically identical but carry a different meaning or force.

In thinking of the word for ‘should’, ‘ought’ etc. (δεῖ) as it occurs in Aristotle, we should think of it as it occurs in ordinary language (e.g. as it has occurred in this sentence) and not just as it occurs in the examples of ‘moral discourse’ given by moral philosophers [...] any fair selection of examples, if we care to summon them up, should convince us that ‘should’ is a rather light word with unlimited contexts of application, and it can be presumed that it is because of this feature that Aristotle chose a roughly corresponding Greek word as the word to put into the universal premise of his schematic practical syllogism⁴⁴.

Let us take now a closer look at the argument. Anscombe asks whether there is any possibility to keep a law conception without a divine law-giver, and she carries out a cursory overview of attempts to this effect. The first she considers is the idea of legislating for oneself, which she assumes to be a fairly bizarre Kantian innovation. She assumes, indeed without argument, that “you cannot be under a law unless it has been promulgated to you”, and adds that the idea that legislation can be “for oneself” is “absurd”, for whatever you do for yourself cannot be “legislating”; indeed, it would mean “to have to frame one’s own rules and to go by them, and if one is lucky it will lead to good”, but whether ‘this leads to good or evil will depend on the content of the rules’⁴⁵. The objection is in order here that she seems to miss the circumstance that ‘self-legislation’ is an obvious enough transfer to ethics of a key-idea from Rousseau’s political theory and also is an expression of the familiar idea – let us think of later Stoicism, Aquinas and Maimonides – that human reason is the source of both contents and authority of the moral law. Besides, her own image of self-legislation looks more like Hare’s prescriptivism⁴⁶ than Kantian ethics. To say the least, the latter implies a somewhat richer picture, where the moral subjects are members of a constitutional kingdom, the ill-famed Kingdom of Ends, and thus at once subjects and legislators⁴⁷. Let me add that

⁴³ C. Diamond, “The Dog that Gave Himself the Moral Law”, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 13/1 (1988) 161-179, pp. 169-171.

⁴⁴ G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention*, p. 64.

⁴⁵ G.E.M. Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy”, p. 186.

⁴⁶ R.M. Hare, *The Language and Morals* (1952) (Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999).

⁴⁷ I. Kant, *Grundlegung der Metaphysik der Sitten* (1785) in *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by the Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: Meiner - de Gruyter, 1902-) vol. IV: 385-463, p. 433.

the distinct meaning of legislating for oneself should turn out much clearer now, a few decades after the revival of Kantian scholarship which Anscombe did not live long enough to take into account. In short, Kantian self-legislation may fairly enough be construed in terms of deliberating about action while taking on oneself the burden of implicit constraints we have built at the very time we engaged in any kind of social practice. This is, amazingly enough, the same point Anscombe herself makes more than once when talking of language games and rules. Let me add that such constraints rest on a ground not altogether different from those of Paul Grice's logic of conversation making rules arise 'spontaneously' from the practice itself⁴⁸. Note that the latter Grice was one more Oxford philosopher, coming from a tradition of linguistic philosophy not too far from the second Wittgenstein, and this may suggest that Anscombe could have easily found an antidote to Oxford philosophy within Oxford philosophy itself. Just a few years after 1958 – apparently without any awareness by Anscombe – John Searle took precisely this step⁴⁹. Besides, a non-consequentialist view of justice and benevolence – Kant's two basic imperatives – has been worked out by Kant himself in the universally neglected *Metaphysics of Morality*⁵⁰, and similar views have been advanced in the last decades by Apel, Habermas, Donagan and O'Neill without falling back into mysterious *ought*.

A second source she discusses is the contractual origin of morality. She discards it on the basis of an *actual* contract condition, declaring it meaningless unless the contract is an historical event⁵¹.

A third possible source she takes more seriously is quasi-contractual source based on our use of language as a sign of "entering into various contracts"⁵². Her first objection is that it has never been worked out and its results, if any, would be rather formal. An interesting coincidence is that a paper by Clarence Lewis, published the same year as "Modern Moral Philosophy", first proposed the idea of 'pragmatic contradiction' as a source of constraints in moral judgements. This was ten years before Karl-Otto Apel launched his own theory where contents of moral judgments are derived from a need to avoid the "performative contradiction", a theory that could allegedly reach "such

⁴⁸ H. P. Grice *Studies in the Ways of Words* (Cambridge, MASS: Harvard University Press, 1989) 22-40.

⁴⁹ J. Searle, "How to derive 'Ought' from 'Is'" (1964) in *Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969) 175-198.

⁵⁰ I. Kant, *Metaphysik der Sitten* (1797) in *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, vol. VI: 203-493, p. 385.

⁵¹ G.E.M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy", p. 186.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 186.

particularities as the prohibition of murder”⁵³. The second objection is that ignorance of your entering into a contract is usually held to be destructive of the nature of a contract. To this, one could object in turn that there are different kinds of ignorance, and ignorance due to fault, or *ignorantia crassa et supine*, is seldom held – and notably it is not by Aquinas – to be destructive of our duty. Theories have been formulated according to which one is not justified in claiming that, while making promises and performing other kinds of speech act, he had not been informed of the circumstance that, by so doing, he was accepting the burden of several commitments. Let me mention, besides Apel’s and Searle’s discussion, Price, Kant and Whewell⁵⁴.

A fourth possibility discussed is that of norms found in human virtues: let us assume that the species *homo sapiens* has such and such virtues, and that a member of the species with the complete set of virtues is the “norm”, not unlike “a complete set of teeth is a norm”⁵⁵, and for humans not only a given number of teeth but also a number of capacities in various fields such as communication, emotions, and judgement is a norm. The problem with this view would be that norm, thus understood, would lose the proper meaning of norm as a law. This, she believes, is not too bad, but the problem is that such an idea of norm cannot be used in order to express the idea of law without bringing God in, and this would imply that the notion of ‘duty’ should disappear.

Before discussing this shift, that is indeed the crucial one, let me mention a fifth possibility that she dismisses *en passant*, that is, the laws of nature as a source for the moral law. The expression used here, ‘laws of nature’, is different enough from the various phrasings she adopts alternatively as a name for the alternative she endorses, namely *natural moral law*, *divine law*, *natural divine law*. In her intentions, this should mark the distance she sees between the two possibilities. Her objection against the ‘laws of nature’ is that this solution is likely “to lead one to eat the weaker according to the laws of nature, but would hardly lead anyone nowadays to the notions of justice”⁵⁶. Thus described, laws of nature look much like the Sophists’ and Hobbes’s state of nature. It is surprising that Aquinas fails to be discussed in this connection in order to

⁵³ K.-O. Apel, “Das Apriori der Kommunikationsgemeinschaft und die Grundlagen der Ethik” (1969) in *Transformation der Philosophie*, 2 vols. (Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M., 1973) 220-263.

⁵⁴ R. Price, *Review of the Principal Questions of Morals* (1758) ed. by D.D. Raphael (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974) ch. 7; I. Kant, *Grundlegung der Metaphysik der Sitten* (1785) in *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, vol. IV: 402-40 and 429-30; W. Whewell, *Elements Of Morality Including Polity*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Parker, 1865, 3rd ed.) ch. 15.

⁵⁵ G.E.M. Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy”, p. 188.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

make it clear that his view of the 'natural law' has little to share with such state-of-nature doctrines.

A sixth possibility is not discussed at all. It is the Stoic view of laws of nature as embodiment of a *rational* world-order, or of the *Logos* with which the world as a whole is infused. Note that this idea is basically the same as the one Augustine found in Plotinus and named *lex aeterna*. It is the standard phrase adopted then by Aquinas (indeed, as an alternative to the phrase *divine law* which he employs on a handful occasions) as a name for his own idea of natural law when viewed from the Creator's point of view, as a kind of objective rational world-order that turns into or, better, yields a prescriptive law once it is "proposed" to his rational creatures. Curiously enough, Anscombe is careful in avoiding mention of "natural law" without further qualification, constantly adding the further adjective "divine", and she seldom mentions "eternal law", while showing a preference for the expression "divine law", in turn seldom used by Aquinas. This has egregiously contributed to making misinterpretations widespread but – once misinterpretations have been duly refuted - it may also be a clue to some deeper tension in Anscombe's own solution. I will come back to this point in what follows. For the time being, the remark is in order that Anscombe surprisingly classifies Stoic philosophy as a whole as belonging to the wider group of "divine law" theories, comparing the Stoics to Jews and Christians, thus making a somewhat unpalatable sandwich with two religious faiths with one philosophical school as a filling. The serious trouble with such treatment of Stoicism is, first, that historically given Stoicism was, in its first phase, a strong philosophical monotheism combined with an "ethic" deriving from metaphysical necessitarianism the prescription to follow one's fate, thus yielding a highly paradoxical kind of immoralism; secondly, that later Stoicism, after Panetius, became less assertive in its metaphysics and accordingly in its philosophical monotheism, and more substantive in its ethics, leaving wide room for *καθέκον* or *officium* (something less than *το δέον*) and thus legitimizing – beyond the ancient school's self-regarding virtue of *ataraxia* – other-regarding virtues as are recommended by Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. The correlation between ethics and Theism in the latter authors seems to be looser than the one found in Aquinas. To be more precise, it seems to be absent in Cicero, faint in Seneca, explicit in Epictetus and remarkably strong in Marcus Aurelius, but playing a role more similar to the one it plays in Moses Mendelsohn and Immanuel Kant than in Aquinas, that is, introduced after the ethical doctrine *qua* self-standing doctrine, as an additional confirmation that there is in the

world an overarching Providence further confirming our confident adhesion to necessity⁵⁷.

5. ARISTOTELIAN MODALS IN PLACE OF THE EMPTY OUGHT

Anscombe's considerations on the cross-breeding between two different sets of ideas, namely the Aristotelian virtue theory and the allegedly Stoic, Hebrew and Christian divine-law doctrine, and the survival of the resulting hybrid, the emphatic 'ought' obtaining its mysterious force by oblivion of origins, are obviously dependent on Schopenhauer filtered through Wittgenstein's teaching. But what was the point Anscombe wanted to make by repeating such a diagnosis? In other words, what was, if any, the way out of the muddle she had in mind?

One answer could be that divine-law ethics, understood as divine-command theory or extreme voluntarism is Anscombe's own ethics⁵⁸. As illustrated above, Wittgenstein's views were rather close to such a view. He was a deeply religious mind, and he had declared that if he had had an ethic this would have the same as a religion and that 'seeing things' from an ethical point of view is taking a point of view on the world that gives it a meaning. The point on which he disagreed with a few among his followers who were Roman Catholics was that he felt he could not believe all the things they did believe, or that his religion was a religion without positive doctrines.

Another current interpretation of her views is that she marked two parallel paths, namely divine law for Theists and, for those unwilling to follow her, "Aristotelianism without divine law"⁵⁹. But, on this interpretation, her overall view would be rather unstable and raise more troubles than it settles: why should we need divine law unless for revealing us additional precepts inaccessible to human beings in the state of *Pure Nature*, without the aid of *Grace*? The latter was an option widely shared in Scholastic theology, but is also one that Anscombe explicitly rejects. She declares not only that her task is

⁵⁷ S. Cremaschi, *Tradizioni morali. Greci, ebrei, cristiani, islamici* (Rome: Edizioni di Letteratura e Storia, 2015) 76-82 and 93-128.

⁵⁸ S. Blackburn, "Simply Wrong", *Times Literary Supplement*, 30 September 2005.

⁵⁹ R. Crisp, "Does Modern Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?", p. 86; O. O'Neill, "Modern Moral Philosophy and the Problem of Relevant Descriptions", in A. O'Hear (ed.) *Modern Moral Philosophy*, 301-316, p.304; Th. Pink, "Moral Obligation", *ibid.*: 159-186.

a purely philosophical, not a theological one, but also that the positive contents of the Christian Gospel do *not* add other precepts to those taught by natural reason or that the “content of the moral law, i.e. the actions which are good or just, is not essentially a matter of revelation”⁶⁰. Note that this is tantamount to endorsing a venerable claim, the one expressed by Grotius in his famous and misinterpreted dictum ‘*etsi daremus Deum non esse*’ and before him, by Caietanus in his formulation of the idea of *pura natura* as a state in which humans are capable of morality without knowing the true religion, and in Aquinas in his definition of the moral law as a dictate of sound reason that recognizes true human goods and prescribes to pursue them.

A third interpretation would be that divine-law theory is *not* Anscombe’s view and, since the content of the moral law is not a matter of revelation and knowledge of good and evil is accessible to everybody, duties would have the nature of hypothetical imperatives. This is the option explicitly defended by Foot, in a first phase arguing that Kant had been unable to conceive of morality without a categorical imperative because he was a psychological hedonist and, once Kant’s psychology and action theory are dropped, it may appear to be obvious that a moral agent just follows hypothetical imperatives. Such an agent desires his/her neighbour’s good and “may care about the suffering of others, having a sense of identification with them, and wanting to help if he can”⁶¹. This holds not just for charity but also for such virtues as honesty, in so far as he/she would “follow honesty for the sake of the good that honest dealing brings to men”⁶². In a second phase, yet, Foot revised her view of practical rationality. She admitted she had been wrong in adopting a Humean view of rationality as tool for guiding action based on desires and prudence while taking it for granted that reasons derive from the agent’s desires⁶³ and declared her adhesion to an Aristotelian view of rationality, where considerations different from desires and prudential considerations, first of all moral considerations, are no more important than desires and prudential considerations, and admitted that “acting morally is part of practical rationality”⁶⁴. A good functioning of practical rationality may be defined

⁶⁰ G.E.M. Anscombe, “Authority in Morals” (1962) in *Ethics, Religion and Politics*, 43-49, p. 49.

⁶¹ Ph. Foot, “Morality as a System of hypothetical imperatives” (1972) in *Virtues and vices*, 157-173, p. 165.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Ph. Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 62-64; cf. W. Quinn, “Putting Rationality in its Place”, in *Morality and Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 228-231.

⁶⁴ Ph. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, p. 9.

starting with the fact that we are living beings endowed with a set of desires and emotions, with some given kind of anatomy and neurological organization but also with a set of social needs. Thus, practical rationality is no special kind of reason, neither because of some special syntactic or semantic characteristic nor because of its connection with sentiments of mental attitudes. It is simply reason when connected with will. There are indeed practical considerations not specifically moral in their nature, but it is because of a mistaken doctrine, namely psychological egoism, that the tendency has prevailed to think that rationality of action corresponds to some benefit it may bring to the agent himself, but there is no reason to rule out collective benefit as a goal for action. Hence the pseudo-problem of a conflict between *moral* and *prudential* reasons arose as well as the unnecessary rigorism of moral philosophical talk as well as the special meaning ascribed to ‘ought’, which is ultimately not so far in meaning from ‘should’ as used in many directions and recommendations having a practical character and a weak moral character or no moral character at all⁶⁵.

The main trouble is, according to Anscombe, that the emphatic use of ‘ought’ allows for formulating such questions as whether, under given circumstances, one *ought* to commit injustice. There are cases, as judicial punishment of an innocent, where “there can be absolutely no argument about the description of this as unjust. No circumstances, and no expected consequences, which do *not* modify the description of the procedure as one of judicially punishing a man for what he is known not to have done can modify the description of it as unjust”⁶⁶. What is out of order in modern moral philosophy, at least after Sidgwick, is that it has become possible to discuss whether such a thing be “morally right”. Instead, it is clear enough that one could not even start a discussion about its being “just”, because such an act is a paradigmatic unjust act. Note that here too Anscombe takes a typically Wittgensteinian move, namely dissolving philosophical problems instead of settling them; in other words, one has to prove not that the consequentialist defence of the repugnant consequence, or the principle of Chaifa, is wicked, which is no business for philosophers, but that it could not even be formulated unless because of an undetected disease of language. On the other hand, Anscombe admits that the term *ought* carries no deep philosophical mystery as the non-cognitivists would make us believe, even though Hume did point out some interesting characteristics in the is-ought connection and has done “a

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80

⁶⁶ G.E.M. Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy”, p. 190.

considerable service by showing that no content could be found in the notion 'morally ought'"⁶⁷.

The problem with Hume is that he was mixing up different issues. One was the half-aware discovery of a relative character of "brute" facts, where something is a fact in relationship to some further level which may be a "fact" in relationship to a still further one⁶⁸. Another issue, which Hume missed, was the relationship between *ought* and *needs*. In *Intention* she remarks that, when somebody aims at health or pleasure, then the enquiry "What's the good of it?" is not a sensible one. As for reasons against a man making one of them his principal aim; and whether there are orders of human goods, e.g., whether some are greater than others, and whether if this is so a man need ever prefer the greater to the less, and on pain of what; this question would belong to Ethics, if there is such a science⁶⁹. Her point is that in cases different from human beings, say the case of a plant, the inference from *is* to *needs* is certainly not in the least dubious, and the difference for human beings is that there is

some sort of necessary connection between what you think *you* need, and what you want. The connection is a complicated one; it is possible *not* to want something that you judge you need. This however, is not a fact about the meaning of the word "to need", but about the phenomenon of *wanting*⁷⁰.

What is *not* a genuine philosophical problem is the transition from *is* to *ought*. The latter could be a totally harmless term when used within one language game and we would learn how to use it by entering the language game itself:

What is this necessity? The answer is given only by describing the procedure, the language-game, which as far as concerns the "necessity" expressed in it does not differ from this one: I say ping and have to say pong [...] There is clearly no answer to "Why do I have to?"[...] But if the procedure has the role of an instrument in people's attainment of so many of the goods of common life, the necessity that people should both actually adopt the procedure, i.e. often give undertakings; and also go along with the procedure, i.e., tend to accept the necessity expressed in that reaction and treat it as a rule – this necessity is a

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

⁶⁸ G.E.M. Anscombe, "On Brute facts" (1958) in *Ethics, Religion and Politics*, pp. 22-25.

⁶⁹ G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention*, pp. 75-76.

⁷⁰ G.E.M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy", p. 178.

necessity of a quite different sort: it is the necessity that Aristotle spoke of, by which something is called necessary if without it good cannot be attained⁷¹.

And elsewhere she adds:

how on earth can it be the meaning of a sign that by giving it one purports to create a necessity of doing something – a necessity whose source is the sign itself, and whose nature depends on the sign [...] Not only promises, but also rules and rights, are essences created and not merely captured or expressed by the grammar of our languages [...]

These musts and can'ts are the most basic expression of such-and-such's being a rule; just as they are the most basic expression in learning the rules of a game, and as they are too in being taught rights and manners. But they aren't, in Hume's phrase, naturally intelligible⁷².

But the point is that there is no legitimate “emphatic” or “moral” use of the term. As its use should either be legitimised by divine law or *not* be legitimised by a view of human norm as endowment with such and such virtues. But, on the one hand it is true that “it remains impossible to infer ‘*morally ought*’ from ‘is’”⁷³, and yet this is just one instance of the more general circumstance that ought “cannot be inferred from anything whatever”, which implies that it is not true that “it could be inferred from other “morally ought” sentences”⁷⁴ if inference has to possess a non-trivial meaning. In other words, Hare's prescriptivism is right at a formal level, that is, when it contends that from a general premise including an ought-predicate some conclusion containing an ought-predicate may be derived. But this is both perfectly true and trivial, since, in order to have a “real” implication, in order not to be left with “a word containing no intelligible thought”⁷⁵, you need to substitute your ought with some real predicate.

Let us consider the promises language-game. Such a procedure is an instrument for a great deal of human activity. One could hardly live in a society without stumbling upon it. Now, what kind of necessity does such a procedure carry?

As shown in the above example of the language-game, it is the necessity in order to attain a good; this is the legitimate Aristotelian sense of necessity, as opposed to the unjustified ‘Kantian’ notion of duty. The word δέῃ in Aristotle

⁷¹ G.E.M. Anscombe, “On Promising and its Justice” (1969) in *Ethics, Religion and Politics*, 10-21, p. 19.

⁷² G.E.M. Anscombe, “Rules, Rights and Promises” (1978) in *Ethics, Religion and Politics*, 97-103, p. 100.

⁷³ G.E.M. Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy”, p. 178.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

carries the same meaning as should or equivalent words in ordinary language “and not as it occurs in the examples of ‘moral discourse’ given by moral philosophers”⁷⁶. Thus, Anscombe’s view may be assumed to be different from Foot’s first view. The non-legalistic imperatives of which morality of an Aristotelian kind consists, may be thought to be different from hypothetical ones. The reason for their binding character – a special one, different from the “Kantian” absolute character of the categorical imperative, might be found in the existence of language games and practices (such as promises) that produce a series of “human assets” or human goods. There is nothing mysterious or metaphysical behind duty or the moral law, except obvious facts such as that we are finite and vulnerable beings living together with other fellow-beings. It is rather obvious that we need cooperation in order to survive and live our lives at their best (with no moral specific meaning implied by the word). Anscombe’s answer is thus that Aristotelian necessity carries directions or prescriptions not to be understood in a legalistic sense and yet binding unconditionally and without exceptions. The reason is that, first, the fact that there are specific needs determined to be such by our own nature makes Aristotelian modals binding, i.e., it is necessary for us to obey such directions or prescriptions in so far as this brings about our nature’s specific good, and secondly, the existence of language games such as promises that could subsist only on the basis of Aristotelian modals is required in view of the production of a wide range of “human goods”⁷⁷. This may be a fair way to settle the discussion about what Anscombe was actually recommending, either virtue ethics or a law view of ethics.

6. HOW DIVINE IS DIVINE NATURAL LAW?

Teichmann aptly comments that many of those aspects of Anscombe’s ethics which have aroused strong reactions are more apparent in contributions to normative and applied ethics where she addresses a Catholic audience, albeit in what purports to be a purely philosophical perspective, for she “believed, like Aquinas, that church teaching about ethical matters could be rationally argued for”,⁷⁸ and that

⁷⁶ G.E. Anscombe, *Intention*, p. 64.

⁷⁷ For useful discussion of C. Diamond, “The Dog that Gave Himself the Moral Law”, pp. 171-178; R. Teichmann, *The Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, pp. 94-102; V. Aucouturier, *Elizabeth Anscombe. L’esprit en pratique* (Paris: Cnrs Editions, 2012) pp. 181-187.

⁷⁸ R. Teichmann, *The Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, p. 83.

the ‘Catholic’ aspect of Anscombe’s moral philosophy is one that is really not so evident in the more meta-ethical pieces. If we were to mention influences at all there, then we would probably have to cite [...] Aristotle for the direction of his thought, Wittgenstein for his philosophical method, and Hume for his ability to raise important and hitherto unnoticed questions⁷⁹.

And yet, besides other sources of puzzlement in purely meta-ethical topics, the notion of divine law has been quite bewildering for commentators. O’Brien remarks that

hasty readers of ‘Modern Moral Philosophy’ have seen in Anscombe’s remarks about moral obligation a kind of crude voluntarism, in which law’s obliging force amount to a mere order backed by a threat, after the fashion of Austinite legal positivism. This reading is mistaken [...] Indeed, the substance of her discussions of law and obligation closely tracks the natural law theism of Aquinas⁸⁰.

In fact, her intention was clearly enough to rescue Aquinas’s view of the moral law, based on the twin concepts of *eternal law* and *natural law*. Yet, a careful reader cannot fail to notice a constant oscillation in her use of terminology, deriving partly from a concern to keep the distinction clear between *positive* and *natural* law (a distinction applying also to divine law, which may be itself *positive* and *natural*), and partly ascribable perhaps to terminological preferences in the literature through which she was introduced to Thomism, and partly dictated by a rhetorical strategy inspired by her polemical strategy against “modern” moral philosophy. This preoccupation may explain passages where she occasionally becomes less clear and bends textual evidence to fit her overall conjecture, namely the Schopenhauerian and Wittgensteinian story about the forgotten Biblical and Christian origins of the notion of duty. One might perhaps classify these passages under the label “semi-official moral ontology” and argue that the “official” view, besides raising serious problems as to the nature and scope of divine law, is incompatible with the Schopenhauerian story, that is, with Anscombe’s third thesis as a whole⁸¹.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁸⁰ M.B. O’Brien, “On Obligation and the Virtues of Law”, p. 91.

⁸¹ Teichmann remarks, with regard to the third thesis, the one about consequentialism, that he believes that it is pretty clear that Anscombe did have the wider modern intellectual culture in mind, not just errors committed by professional philosophers. But he adds that “with her second thesis it is rather less clear [...] a reader of *MMP* would do well to consider Anscombe’s second thesis with the injunction in mind ‘If the cap fits, wear it’, applying the injunction to himself and those around him” (*The Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, pp. 104-105).

It is well-known how the idea of natural law carries out a decisive function for Aquinas but the latter might be profitably analysed in more detail. Aquinas in *Summa Theologiae* designates by the term *lex aeterna*, taken from Augustine, a rational world order or the plan of divine providence. When he mentions *lex naturalis* he means a kind of “participation” in the eternal law, or the eternal law itself when considered as “proposed” to God’s rational creatures. In the *Summa contra Gentes* – an earlier work – such order, considered in the same way, is named *lex divina*⁸². The latter expression has a limited number of occurrences also in *Summa Theologiae*, albeit it shows up just twice in the *Prima Secundae*, as a way of introducing the idea of a natural law as distinguished from positive (either divine and human) law and, after that, going on talking just of natural and positive law⁸³. A few more occurrences are in the less theoretically challenging *Secunda Secundae* but the phrase *lex divina* (or occasionally *jus divinum*) is either equivalent to positive divine law as contrasted with natural divine law or, less often, with *lex aeterna*⁸⁴.

Note that, even though the *Summa Theologiae* addresses a Christian audience, yet in various parts of *Prima Secundae* Aquinas proceeds on the basis of argument from reason, i.e., purely philosophical ones, and the thrust of the argument points not at the divine character of the moral law but, *vice versa*, at the extensional equivalence between dictates of sound reason and precepts of the natural law, exception being made for positive divine law. That is, albeit addressing, unlike Anscombe, a Christian, not a secularized audience, his overall argument points at the conclusion that natural law may be totally translated into dictates of sound reason or of practical wisdom, which do have prescriptive force but do not need to be formulated as laws, and thus the law-view of ethics, far from being the peculiar trait of an imaginary Christian-Hebrew-Stoic ethics, is just one among various ways in which the demands of virtue may be construed⁸⁵.

⁸² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, book III, chs. 115, 119, 121, 128, 129; note that in this work Aquinas is addressing an audience such as the Muslims who were not assumed to accept the Christian Revelation but were assumed to be fully convinced of the existence of God and his character of legislator.

⁸³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia-IIae q. 91, a. 1, ad 1, ad 3; a. 4, ob. 1, ad 1; q. 93 art. 5, resp.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, IIa-IIae, q. 57, a. 2, ad 3; q. 109, a. 2, ad 3; q. 124, a. 5, ad 2; q. 141, a. 2, ad 1; for comments cf J. Finnis, *Aquinas. Moral, Political, and Legal Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 308-309.

⁸⁵ S. Cremaschi, *Tradizioni morali*, pp. 320-322.

In “The Justice of the Present War Examined” of 1939, Anscombe starts with a complaint about the loss of the “idea of natural moral law” among “modern men”, adding that

without it they cannot live in peace within themselves, or socially or internationally. For the natural law is the law of man’s own nature, showing how he must choose to act in matters where his will is free, if his nature is to be properly fulfilled [...]

To those who believe in God it will rightly appear that His law, the eternal law, has its reflection in the ordered activity of Creation, that ‘law of nature’ which is the truth of things. In man, this activity is not wholly determined, but here is an element of choice. Thus far, “to him the law is proposed; it is not imposed upon him”. But it is no less law for that; it binds because it is the law of his nature. And in what it consists he can discover by reason, checked and guaranteed by divine revelation of Scripture⁸⁶.

On this basis, one may safely argue that she had it already clear in mind that moral truths are within the reach of human knowledge, for the natural law is the law of man’s own nature and thus such truths are the same for all, atheists, agnostics and devout believers; besides, that the latter may have *good reasons* to see the world order as a divine order, an order which is reflected in the Creation; and also that believers may *recognize* in the moral teaching of the Hebrew-Christian tradition a confirmation of those they have already been able to detect as *the law of (wo)man’s own nature*. Mary Geach Gormally correctly remarked that

Anscombe maintains that the class of actions which are illicit (i.e., contrary to divine law) is the same class as the class of actions which are contrary to the virtues which one has to have in order to be a good human being. She did not think one needed a divine law conception of ethics to know what a good human being was, or what virtues he had⁸⁷.

In *Modern Moral Philosophy* the same concept is mentioned again more than once. Differences in argumentative strategy with the 1939 paper stem, first, from the presence of the notion of virtue on a par with that of law; secondly, from introduction of the distinction between *natural* divine law and *positive* divine law; thirdly from an oscillation in terminology that makes so that the *natural* law is called most of the time *divine* law.

⁸⁶ G.E.M. Anscombe, “The justice of the present war examined”, in *Ethics, Religion and Politics*, 72-81, pp. 72-73.

⁸⁷ M. Geach, “Letter to the Editor”, *Times Literary Supplement*, Oct 7 2005.

With regard to the third point, “positive divine law” occurs only once⁸⁸, while “natural divine law” occurs twice⁸⁹. Both expressions are clearly taken from Aquinas, for whom they designate, the first the particular prescriptions given by God to the chosen people and later on to the Christian Church, such as the duty to worship on Saturday or Sunday, to fast on Yom Kippur or Good Friday and so on, mainly with a cultic character, and the second the whole of moral law, which is divine in its nature in so far as, after Creation (or, as William of Ockham more plausibly suggested later on, at the very moment of Creation and as an inseparable part of the act of Creation) he promulgated the moral law, which had already been written in the divine *Logos* as reflected in the world order and proposed to humankind through the latter’s ability to detect the inner law of its own nature.

Three years after “Modern Moral Philosophy”, Anscombe insists that those specific precepts which human reason is able to discover are confirmed later on by divine revelation. The latter, yet, may add to *motives* but not to the specific *contents* of such Aristotelian modals, for “the motives, spirit, meaning and purpose” of the moral life of Christians depend on revelation, and yet one should keep in mind

both that the law of love had already been taught in the Old Testament and that the content of the moral law, i.e. the actions which are good and just, is not essentially a matter of revelation [...] what there does not seem to be room for is moral truths which are *per se* revealed⁹⁰.

The report of discussion following the paper’s presentation informs us that

It was objected that the ‘new law’ of Christ was indeed a revelation in the domain of morality. The speaker admitted this in the sense that the motives, spirit, meaning and purpose of the moral life of Christians depended on revelation, while insisting both that the law of love had already been taught in the Old Testament and that the content of the moral law, i.e., the actions which are good and just, is not essentially a matter of revelation⁹¹.

Things become tricky as we approach what has been called the problem of promulgation⁹². Clearly enough, even though Aristotle cannot be depicted as

⁸⁸ G.E.M. Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy”, p. 177 fn 2.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 177 fn 2 and 187.

⁹⁰ G.E.M Anscombe, “Authority in morals” (1962) in *Ethics, Religion and Politics*, 43-50, p. 50.

⁹¹ Cf. the discussion’s report after the same paper, *Ibid.*, p. 50; cf. R. Teichmann, *The Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, pp. 107-8.

⁹² C. Vogler, “Modern Moral Philosophy Again: Isolating the Promulgation Problem”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 106 (2006) 347-364.

defending a position opposed to natural law theories, Aristotelian necessity does not require a legislator and apparently does not need the notion of law⁹³. On the contrary, the idea of a divine law, including both positive and natural law, with the implied assumption of a divine law-giver, plays an important role in Aquinas's system of ideas. I would add that this is true of such system as a whole but, once we shift to Aquinas's philosophical ethics as such – assuming that it can indeed be reconstructed isolating it from his theological doctrines – natural law may stand on its own feet, supported by the dictates of sound human reason. The fact that dictates of human reason converge with those of natural law is of the greatest import for the system but might be safely ignored by the righteous human being who has not been blessed by the gift of knowledge of divine revelation. This – I would add – is precisely a point William of Ockham makes in a more explicit way than Aquinas when talking of the “philosopher's virtue” as distinguished from the “Christian's virtue”⁹⁴.

Anscombe repeatedly insists that the divine law-giver is required, albeit *in different ways*, both by positive divine law, i.e., those which she calls “the ramified prescriptions of the Torah”⁹⁵, and by “the requirements of ‘natural divine law’”⁹⁶. She illustrates this by her cryptic example of the Stoics compared to Jews and Christians. She writes:

one might be inclined to think that a law conception of ethics could arise only among people who accepted an allegedly divine positive law; that this is not so is shown by the example of the Stoics, who also thought that whatever was involved in conformity to human virtues was required by divine law⁹⁷.

The objection might be raised that this passage raises more questions than it answers, in so far as the notion of a Creator God is missing in the Stoic philosophy in all of its versions, and thus for the Stoics the very notion of promulgation would have looked like a rather obscure one. For them, the divine *Logos* was present in the world by a kind of *participation*, neither by divine decree nor by an act of creation, and the human mind was in a position to discover it within itself in so far as it was a *meros*, a part, of a universe imbued with divine reason. Thus, the Stoic view at its best could lead, rather than to a divine law promulgated by a law-giver God, to a view of the moral

⁹³ C. Vogler, “Aristotle, Aquinas, Anscombe and the New Virtue Ethics”, in T. Hoffmann, J. Müller, M. Perkams (eds.) *Aquinas and the Nicomachean Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 239-257.

⁹⁴ S. Cremaschi, *Tradizioni morali*, pp. 313-319 and 344-317.

⁹⁵ G.E.M. Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy”, p. 177 fn 2.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 175

law as autonomously dictated by human reason, that is, to a view Anscombe disliked because of her own anti-Kantian prejudice.

One among other bewildering elements in the language of “Modern Moral Philosophy” is the adoption of the phrase “divine law” instead of the standard “natural law”. This is, as mentioned, a term used by Aquinas but not the one adopted in the standard systematic presentation of his ethics, i.e., the *Prima Secundae*. Another is the expression “*law* conception of ethics”, apparently one of Anscombe’s neologisms whose precise meaning is, yet, far from obvious but whose function in her argument is but too clear, namely stressing an alleged incompatibility between modern ethics, unavowed and confused theology-without-God, and Medieval ethics, a masterly synthesis of Reason and Revelation.

Let me come now to the decisive point. What has gone wrong with Anscombe’s Aristotelian moral realism contrasted with delusory modern, so to say “non-naturalist”, hypostatization of the moral ought? I would suggest that by the above remark concerning the Stoics and divine natural law she commits both a Freudian *lapsus* betraying her polemical intentions and a logical fallacy. The passage before the quoted remark reads:

How did this come about? The answer is in history: between Aristotle and us came Christianity, with its *law* conception of ethics. For Christianity derived its ethical conception from the Torah⁹⁸.

This fits well enough the Schopenhauerian story that Anscombe incorporated in her own third thesis, but, if history is as important for theoretical arguments as she seems to believe, it should be at least carried out on academic standards. Now, the word Torah in Hebrew does not mean *law* but rather *instruction* and was first translated into Greek as *Nomos*, which in turn means both law and a handful other things. As a proof that Christianity has a “*law* conception” of ethics, the above half-line is thus a scant proof. Besides, the original Christian preaching had little to share with philosophical conceptions of any kind and its targets were of a different kind, while later reformulations using Platonic, Stoic and middle-Academic concepts were probably acceptable and even useful undertakings, but they could hardly claim the title of Divine Revelation. The following remark about the Stoics – its legitimate preoccupation notwithstanding to clarify that *natural law* is not tantamount to *positive divine law* – is no more than friendly fire shot on her own thesis, firstly because the Stoic view of *Logos* is incompatible with the

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

idea of a promulgated law, and secondly, because the Stoics were not “people”, like Jews and Christians, but just one philosophical school among others.

7. AND HOW ARISTOTELIAN IS ARISTOTELIAN NECESSITY?

Anscombe is commonly, and plausibly enough, classified as the founding ‘father’ of one current, neo-naturalism, including Geach, Foot, Murdoch, MacIntyre, and perhaps Hursthouse. This is not too bad – at least more plausible than classifying her as the founder of virtue ethics – for naturalism is a kind of *anti-non-naturalism* consisting in a double negation, namely refusal of Moore’s argument against the naturalistic fallacy. But such classification would be utterly false if the choice of the term was meant to suggest the slightest similarity with what is understood most of the time for *ethical naturalism*, namely the kind of theories defended by Peter Railton, Robert Boyd and David Brink⁹⁹.

Oddly enough, one of the claims in “Modern Moral Philosophy” is that non-naturalist moral realism, an ontological claim about the existence of special entities such as those designated by the words ‘duty’ and ‘ought’ – as opposed to those indicated by ordinary use of the words ought, should etc. – is utterly mistaken. In other words, that the claim according to which some entities are “moral facts” with a different character from that of everyday-life facts is a mistake. This is assumed by her to be a claim explicitly advanced by Kant, Moore and Ross, but also one of the basic unspoken assumptions of “modern” ethics. The argument provided in order to support the claim is a typically Wittgensteinian one. The philosopher’s task is assumed to consist not in *proving* by argument, but just in *showing* something by recalling what has been forgotten, thus healing some pathology of language. It is a negative task, consisting in reminding the audience that some words, which have been mistaken for things, are just words. The basic assumption for the rejection of moral realism is Wittgenstein’s argument about family resemblances, namely that there is no essence necessarily laying at the root of series of terms each of them connected by some resemblance with the previous and the following one.

⁹⁹ S. Cremaschi, “Naturalizzazione senza naturalismo: una prospettiva per la metaetica”, *Etica & Politica / Ethics & Politics*, 9/2 (2007) 201-217, retrievable at http://www2.units.it/~etica/2007_2/CREMASCHI.pdf.

And yet, her refutation of strong moral realism notwithstanding, Anscombe argues something that is virtually the opposite of what has been going around in the last decades under the label anti-realism. In current Anglo-Saxon jargon this would be called – indeed with some useless confusion – one more kind of “naturalistic realism”. A better phrase might be “everyday-life realism”, implying that there are things like health, well-being, life, freedom and joy – those things that Aristotle and Aquinas called “human goods” – and that such words as “owes”, “ought” and “duty” make perfectly sense even without any assumption of some kind of special entities behind them, nor are they conventional, arbitrary, fictitious since we ascribe them the meaning they have in everyday language.

The above may be Anscombe’s argument at its best. Yet, she might hardly be said to have helped her readers in getting it right. This may depend on her Wittgensteinian taste for cryptic expressions but also on her attempt to combine Wittgensteinian with Thomist ways of thinking. The trouble for the reader is her lack of clearness about the points where Wittgenstein did not go far enough and those where Aquinas went simply wrong. This failure may arguably be accounted for in biographical terms, depending on deep affection and respect in the former case and on a fear of not looking as orthodox as any Catholic-born traditionalist would have been in the latter, but biographical *causes* can hardly provide *reasons* of any kind.

This unresolved tension opened the door for diverging moral ontologies, proposed by fellow-travellers and followers. A revealing case is Geach’s, who, two decades after his 1956 brilliant refutation of Moore, ventured into writing a systematic book on ethics where he argues that we need the virtues for the kind of arguments hinted at by Anscombe in the abovementioned pregnant-women-and-athletes passage, that is, because we need them. Need is “a teleological notion: necessity for the attainment of an end”¹⁰⁰. He declares that it makes good sense to ask “What are men for?”¹⁰¹, and goes as far as declaring that we need the virtues as bees need stings, that is, we need them for individual human flourishing and besides as tools for the preservation of the species or preconditions for carrying out collective enterprises¹⁰², which is in turn justified by the species-trait that imposes on us, among other things, also concern for others¹⁰³. Thus virtue is built-in in our species, and the source of the prescriptive force of ethics lies in the species itself, understood in a wide

¹⁰⁰ P. Geach, *The Virtues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) p. 9.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

sense, both biological and cultural, but nonetheless with all serious problems arising from such strong grounding of ethics in ontology. Such a possibility had been just tentatively explored by Anscombe with acute awareness of the work still to be done if we are to prove that this direction of inquiry is a fruitful one¹⁰⁴, and carried instead to its full consequences by Geach with all the open questions to be expected. Another case is MacIntyre's swinging between refusal of Aristotelian teleology as a basis for virtue theory in *After Virtue* and his U-turn toward an objective teleological structure of the world in *Dependent Rational Animals*¹⁰⁵. The anti-Kantian blind alley suggested by Anscombe has been explored in depth by Foot in her own theory of morality as a system of hypothetical imperatives and its following revision¹⁰⁶. A more interesting way out of the conundrum has been marked by Hursthouse with her view of ethics as Neurathian self-transformation of morality within morality itself, thus leaving her own kind of everyday-life realism or "naturalism" the more tractable status of a transcendental assumption instead of that of a theoretical claim¹⁰⁷.

After 1958 Anscombe never planned a systematic ethical work, even though ethics was always one of her main concerns and – surprisingly enough – went on doing ethics in spite of her first thesis that had announced that we should ban it from our minds. She came back to it on several occasions, on some of them with remarkably balanced pieces such as those on the status of embryo and euthanasia where she proved how Wittgenstein's lesson may be of use in applied ethics by showing how solution of theoretical uncertainties may be not indispensable in order to reach "practical certainties"¹⁰⁸. On other occasions, she simply awoke the same metaphysical ghosts she had been trying to exorcize in 1958, for example when contrasting some "virtues, like honesty about property, and sobriety", allegedly "utilitarian in character", that is, aimed at promoting the "material well-ordering of human life", with others, such as respect for human life and chastity that are "supra-utilitarian and

¹⁰⁴ C. Vogler, "Modern Moral Philosophy Again: Isolating the Promulgation Problem", pp. 358-362.

¹⁰⁵ A. MacIntyre *After Virtue* (1981) (Notre Dame, IND: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007); *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago, ILL: Open Court, 1999).

¹⁰⁶ Foot "Morality as a system of hypothetical imperatives"; *Natural Goodness*.

¹⁰⁷ R. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹⁰⁸ G.E.M. Anscombe, "The Early Embryo. Theoretical Doubts and Practical Certainties", in *Faith in a Hard Ground, Essays on Religion, Philosophy and Ethics*, ed. by M. Geach and L. Gormally (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2008) 214-223; "Murder and the Morality of Euthanasia", *ibid.*, 261-277.

hence mystical"¹⁰⁹. Such fluctuations – I suggest – may depend on emergence at different times either of her “official” moral ontology centred on *Aristotelian necessity* or of the “semi-official” moral ontology centred on *theistic necessity* arising from divine promulgation.

By way of conclusion, Anscombe’s answer to the question of the status of morality suffers from an unresolved tension between outright non-realism and naturalistic realism, or between Wittgenstein/Schopenhauer and Aquinas. In more detail, if her claim on the status of duty in its viable sense, the Aristotelian one, is that it consists of necessity grounded in needs, then the missing links in her argument are still how are human goods recognized to be such and what is the individual’s motivation for cooperating in providing human goods instead of being a free-rider.

8. A TENSION BETWEEN THE LAW-VIEW AND THE NEED-VIRTUE-RULE VIEW

An important part of the argument in “Modern Moral Philosophy” rests on the (successful or failed) proof of the fact that “modern” moral philosophy is so shallow because of being squashed by the weight of a notion, the emphatic ought, which turns out to be no more than an empty word. Her real target consists in a couple of notions highly popular at her time and place, Hume’s law and the naturalistic fallacy. The implication she is constantly drawing is, yet, that modern ethics as a whole – including thinkers she does not really know such as Moses Mendelsohn, Kant, Price and Whewell – has gone astray, that it stands on no firmer basis than unaware secularized Christian dogma and needs to be substituted with a grand return to robust Aristotelian guidelines for human flourishing.

The serious problems with her argument are: first, that her textual reconstruction is defective, misunderstanding Kant¹¹⁰, ignoring the intuitionists, misreading the early Stoics as proponents of a divine-law view; secondly, that the historical reconstruction is flawed by defective knowledge of the history of Christian theology and none at all of the Hebrew Bible and the Rabbinic literature¹¹¹, by strange ideas about Reformed moral theology,

¹⁰⁹ G.E.M. Anscombe, “Contraception and Chastity”, *The Human World*, 7 (1972) 9-30, p. 22.

¹¹⁰ On comparative closeness between Anscombe and the real Kant, cf R. Teichman, *The Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, p. 121.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-28.

declared on rather dubious authorities to be a kind of antinomianism¹¹², and by the unverified idea that eighteenth-century European culture, or at least philosophy, was *secularized* and Christian morality had left only relics¹¹³.

The merit of Anscombe's reconstruction is having looked at the British discussion with an outsider's eye while being enough of an insider as to call for counter-objections instead of silence. Thus, at her best she laid bare the shortcomings of crude naturalistic realism that identifies the good with pleasure as well as of confused non-naturalistic realism postulating the existence of unnecessary mysterious entities.

Her overall diagnosis is, yet, not just based on inaccurate textual interpretation and historical reconstruction but also incurably flawed in its theoretical claims as they have been *de facto* formulated. In more detail, once the historical argument that provides much of the basis for her three theses had been amended, she should have had to choose among two incompatible options between which she recurrently wavers, namely:

A. The thesis that the same commands and prohibitions that a law view of ethics would prescribe are accessible to human cognitive capacities with their own "motive force" (the Kantian *Triebfeder*) expressed in the language of virtues and needs, but such an ethic would be identical to a divine law ethics in the Jewish and Christian tradition, which would add no more than an additional "moving force" to the same body of prescriptions, or peculiar "motives, meaning, spirit and purpose of the moral life"¹¹⁴;

B. The thesis that a law view of ethics requires a God as an enacting authority and ethics and the divine law-giver are indissolubly tied so that the former cannot exist in a non-corrupted shape without the latter.

I have illustrated how Anscombe does on more than one occasion adopt thesis A. Unlike Peter Geach, she apparently never explicitly defends thesis B. In fact Geach argued at least on one occasion against Socrates's claim in the *Eutyphro*, namely that what pleases the Gods pleases them because it is right

¹¹² To prove that belief in divine law "was substantially given up among Protestants at the time of the Reformation" she refers to "the decree of Trent against the teaching that Christ was only to be trusted in as mediator, not obeyed as legislator" (G.E.M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy", pp. 176-177 and 177 fn.) as if the Council of Trent could be taken as a reliable source on Protestant doctrines by any apprentice historian of Christianity; on divine law cf. Ch. Pigden, "Anscombe on Ought", pp. 35-37; Diamond, "The Dog that Gave Himself the Moral Law", pp. 162-165.

¹¹³ Ch. Pigden, "Anscombe on Ought", pp. 32-35.

¹¹⁴ G.E.M. Anscombe, "Authority in morals", p. 50.

and not *vice versa*, and for him faith in a provident God provides the only possible motivation for refusal of the consequentialist case for making the most repugnant action right in case of extreme necessity¹¹⁵. Anscombe's claims never went so far. She argued at most that an argument frequently referred to as decisive is not acceptable. Her argument is that

If someone does have a divine law conception of ethics, all the same, he has to agree that he has to have a judgment that he ought (morally ought) to obey the divine law; so his ethic is in exactly the same position as any other¹¹⁶.

Her objection to this argument is that the notion "morally ought" is devoid of any content, not that without faith in divine providence we would have a reason to heed in extreme cases to the consequentialist enticement to do evil that good may come, and thus her position is different from Geach's. One may add that she appeals in support of her own anti-consequentialist position to the authority of Aristotle, for whom there were actions that were to be rejected as such on the basis of their very definition¹¹⁷.

Thus, on principle Anscombe defends the existence of natural morality, qualifying it as one construed in the language of virtues, needs and rules of games, but no less equipped with its own moral absolutes not different from those of a divine law view. She contrasts to it the divine law view as adding one more source of motivation, that is, as allowing for a conception of what humans qua humans need as also commanded by a legitimate authority and thus, and only on this basis, also expressed in the language of law.

A different story is the story of Anscombe's interventions in ethical discussion after 1958, a few of them remarkably balanced and others heavily suffering from her willingness to argue, on the basis of purely philosophical arguments, conclusions she firmly believes must be identical with those of the Catholic Magisterium. The pieces on contraception are the worst among these, and here the 1958 rather plausible defence of a kind of Aristotelian "moral absolutes", a class of actions that cannot be practised in a middle way, but simply must not be done, is dropped in favour of a defence of the existence of

¹¹⁵ P.T. Geach, "The moral law and the law of God", in *God and the Soul* (London: Routledge, 1969) p. 170; for plausible criticism cf M.B. O'Brien, "On Obligation and the Virtues of Law", pp. 95-97.

¹¹⁶ G.E.M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy", p. 179.

¹¹⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1107a 12-14; cf G.E.M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy", pp. 193 and 196; for comments cf R. Teichmann, *The Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, pp. 121-122.

moral absolutes as a prolegomenon to justification without argument of any prohibition whatsoever because one cannot do “evil” that good may come¹¹⁸.

This is not meant to deny that Anscombe’s work in ethics carried a number of fruitful suggestions. It is not by chance that she succeeded in stirring up a hornet’s nest. But her most felicitous suggestions provide reasons, more than for resurrection of Aristotelian virtue ethics, for a revival of something that – as suggested by Alan Donagan – had always been there, namely, natural morality, or better autonomous ethics, exemplified by a tradition ranging from Panetius and Cicero to Kant and Price where also Aristotle and Aquinas could find a reasonably comfortable place.

9. CONCLUSIONS

A rational reconstruction of Anscombe’s ethics, when taken at its best, may be the following:

1. There are no moral laws. There are objective recommendations based on Aristotelian not-emphatic should, ought or must (in order to be a fully human being I should do y).
2. These recommendations do not relate solely to consequences of actions but are conferred their cogent character by a number of different considerations; they do not allow all kinds of possible actions; some actions are in themselves inconceivable *whatever the consequences*.
3. Good or duty do not constitute the raw material out of which such necessity is made; Aristotelian modals relate to a plurality of characteristics of actions (just, chaste etc.); talk of virtue serves only to highlight such diversity but does not imply that the virtues are the main notions in an adequate ethical theory.
4. To characterize these recommendations as laws is a mistake arising from a disease of language that leads to understand as conceivable prescriptions that are in fact unconceivable; yet, these laws can be legitimately considered to exist by those who affirm the existence of a divine law-giver; thus for theists the same contents of Aristotelian necessity can be construed as a system of laws or commands, but this does not make any difference in what it forbids or commands but does make a difference as to spirit and its motivation.

¹¹⁸ S. Cremaschi, “Elizabeth Anscombe on Consequentialism and Absolute Prohibitions”, pp. 28-30.

Against the ethical theory reconstructed above a few objections may be raised:

1. As in a democratic political society I recognize laws without affirming the existence of a law-giver above myself – which means both I and We – as a member of the universal community of beings endowed with practical wisdom, I can consider myself a member of a community of law-givers.
2. Once this objection has been formulated, the critique of spurious moral realism would remain valid; the validity of a not-exclusively-moral realism such as the one defended by Anscombe does not imply the spurious character of *any* kind of theory claiming the existence of moral laws without the assertion of the existence of God.
3. Anscombe at her best is a consistent supporter of the existence of a natural morality in the wake of Thomas (and, without knowing it, de Vio, William of Ockham, William Whewell, Moses Mendelsohn, and Immanuel Kant) and an enemy of any extreme voluntarism of the Augustinian kind. As such, she could have taught a lesson of universalism, liberal neutrality and toleration to her fellow-Catholics.
4. Historically given Anscombe, yet, often insists on replacing the phrase natural law with the phrase divine law, repeating at first sight the same claims put forth by Aquinas but giving the argument an opposite *direction*; that is, where Thomas argues that the law of God, for anyone who admits his existence, prescribes the same actions as those commanded by sound reason, sometimes Anscombe contrasts prescriptions made by consequentialism, arising out of a disease of language, not to a set of prescriptions based on argument not vitiated by linguistic confusion but instead to divine law.
5. In addition, while in some places she says that God's law has no content different from that of natural morality, in other places at least she does not overtly refute Geach's fallacious argument according to which, in order to remain faithful to the moral law even in case an extreme evil should be avoided, we need to believe in the existence of divine providence that will prevent the extreme evil to happen.
6. And finally, she repeatedly confuses the plain Aristotelian doctrine of existence of classes of actions that are vicious in themselves with the obscure medieval doctrine of the *intrinsece malum* or of the existence of prohibitions valid *semper ac ad semper*, a doctrine that

is a jumble of logical fallacies and has been used as a justification for those pronouncements of the Catholic Magisterium teaching that are devoid of any firmer ground than an earlier pronouncement by the Magisterium itself.

7. The divine-law view of ethics does not mirror any consistent body of beliefs shared in the Hebrew-Christian religious tradition, not to mention the Stoics; in this tradition one may find a divine command doctrine (having to do with faith but little with morality), and then various moral doctrines centred on divine instruction, wisdom, God's imitation, God's and one's neighbour's love; just in Scholasticism one first meets a natural-law doctrine, quite respectable and yet somewhat wider than Anscombe's divine law; and the suggestion may be not out of place that the divine-law doctrine is superadded and unnecessary.

REALISM WITHOUT OBJECTIVITY CAN ONE BE BOTH REALIST AND QUIETIST IN ETHICS?

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ABSTRACT

If there is a substantial stake in the philosophical discussion about moral realism, then this concerns the viable answers to questions like the following: Does our concept of reality allow for “stuff” like goods, values or obligations which seem at first sight abstruse? Can room be made for a subset of “facts” united by the property of somehow belonging to the (admittedly vague) field of morality? Is there an accessible theoretical space wherein a form of impersonal or at any rate non-special knowledge of these facts can be developed? In the essay, I take a stand and argue for a variety of moral realism that is disconnected from any sense of moral anxiety. Simply put, I assume not only that, as a rule, the quality of a society’s moral life does not depend on the meta-ethics prevailing in the (notoriously thin) community of moral philosophers, but that there are non-realist moral theories that, ideally, can be regarded as effective bulwarks against immorality or amorality. Nor I think that there is an a priori incompatibility between a realist stance in ethics and a non-panadaptationist view of biological evolution, which does not purport to explain all that exists and matters in people’s lives exclusively in the light of its reproductive fitness. As a result, I see the relevant dispute as revolving around the (comparatively) higher or lower plausibility of the reconstruction of the conditions of intelligibility of moral experience, as it manifests itself in the human life-form or, more modestly, in the societies or cultures inhabited by the philosophers contributing to the debate of interest here.

KEYWORDS

Morality, realism, neo-Darwinism, sense for reality

Moral knowledge is not simply intellectual grasp of propositions; it is not even simply intellectual grasp of particular facts; it is perception. It is seeing a complex, concrete reality in a highly lucid and richly responsive way; it is taking in what is there, with imagination and feeling
Martha C. Nussbaum

1. MORAL ANXIETIES

If there is a substantial stake in the philosophical discussion about moral realism, then this concerns the viable answers to questions like the following: Does our concept of reality allow for “stuff” like goods, values or obligations which seem at first sight abstruse? Can room be made for a subset of “facts” united by the property of somehow belonging to the (admittedly vague) field of morality? Is there an accessible theoretical space wherein a form of impersonal or at any rate non-special knowledge of these facts can be developed?

Questions of this kind may assume a dramatic tone and a more than theoretical significance if a positive answer is taken to be the inescapable condition for safeguarding something that is seen as essential in the human life-form. In this case, acknowledging the existence of moral facts is understood as the necessary outcome of a transcendental argument, where a realist view of morality appears as the only consistent way of making sense of a true moral experience, whether the latter is conceived of in evaluative or in prescriptive terms.

As I frame in broad terms my take on the issue of moral realism, I have in the back of my mind familiar stances such as: (1) anti-relativism (in the wide spectrum ranging from Dostoyevsky’s to Diego Marconi’s or Roberta De Monticelli’s),¹ where giving up objectivity is sensed as a kind of surrender to the view that, as long as value judgments are concerned, “anything goes”; or: (2) anti-materialism, where an idea of nature in which no room is left for something that does not fit with the scientific worldview is fiercely disputed (as in, for example, Thomas Nagel’s *Mind and Cosmos*).

In what follows, I want to take a stand and argue for a variety of moral realism that is disconnected from this sense of urge. Simply put, I assume not only that, as a rule, the quality of a society’s moral life does not depend on the meta-ethics prevailing in the (notoriously thin) community of moral philosophers, but that there are non-realist moral theories that, ideally, can be regarded as effective bulwarks against immorality or amorality. (What I am gesturing at here is that I am unable to see any logical fallacy in, for example, a constructivist theory of

¹ Cf. D. Marconi, *Per la verità. Relativismo e filosofia*, Einaudi, Torino, 2007; R. De Monticelli, *La questione morale*, Cortina, Milano, 2010.

human rights.) Nor I think that there is an a priori incompatibility between a realist stance in ethics and a non-panadaptationist view of biological evolution, which does not purport to explain all that exists and matters in people's lives exclusively in the light of its reproductive fitness.² As a result, I understand the relevant dispute as revolving around the (comparatively higher or lower) plausibility of the reconstruction of the conditions of intelligibility of moral experience, as it manifests itself in the human life-form (if something like this exists) or, more modestly, in the societies or cultures populated by the philosophers contributing to the debate of interest here.

If my way of framing the issue succeeds, it will lead to a quietist conclusion in two different senses. On the one hand, because its goal goes no further than showing the relative superiority of a realist account of moral experience by capitalizing on a style of reasoning which, while retaining the form of a transcendental (or abductive) argument, gives up any inescapability claim as to its conclusions and content itself with making plausible a *prima facie* baffling claim, i.e. that strange things such as moral "properties" are part of the furniture of the world. On the other hand, turning an unfathomable enigma into an ordinary fact should have the side effect of dissolving the anxieties that have been piling up around the alleged "queerness" or *Sonderstellung* of the human form of life in the physical world during the last centuries. Such anxieties account for, among other things, the disproportionate role played by the naturalistic fallacy argument in modern ethical discussion. If I had to resort to a slogan to sum up my aims in this essay, I could say that I would be glad to expand the philosophically beneficial effects of deconstructing the "myth of the given" to the ethical field.

2. IN SEARCH OF REALITY

The semantic density and the historical stratification of the concept of "reality" (as well as of "fact" or, for what it is worth, "objectivity") is what makes the controversies on moral realism unpalatable to those who have managed to retain a residual theoretical naiveté and a tad of detachment from philosophical encyclopaedism. It is actually unclear how this kind of complexity can be handled without paying an excessive price in terms of ambiguity and vagueness. (In many

² For an excellent exploration of the theoretical limits of "Darwinism in its current scientific incarnation," see D.J. Depew, B. Weber, "The Fate of Darwinism: Evolution after the Modern Synthesis," *Biological Theory*, 6, 2011, pp. 89-102.

regards, it cannot even be taken for granted that the concept of reality is a coherent concept.) Yet, one has to make as explicit as possible the tacit background of this worn-out notion and try to turn the familiar into something questionable, lest one loses the grip on the whole issue. Provided that moral realists wish to make room in the ordinary understanding of reality for the idea that ethics is a phenomenon in its own right, there has to be some form of agreement on the use one wants to make of a term that has neither rigid reference nor an uncontested sense.

I begin with this caveat because my main aim here is to understand whether the current philosophical discussion is open to a view that I see as heavily underrepresented. This view is firmly positioned in the realist camp – if by moral realism we mean an outlook that rejects the intellectually sophisticated idea that morality is a purely human construct, more precisely an expression of the human will – although its followers shy away from interpreting “real” as an epistemic property, i.e. as the content of a justified true belief.³ For this variety of moral realism, in other words, it is enough to figure out compelling reasons to hold the common-sense belief that moral experience makes somehow “contact” with what is out there and, consequently, that the resistance felt by most people to getting rid of any moral scruple does not result from a mere psychological conditioning. Even in the unlikely event that a universal agreement could be reached about this, the consensus would not exempt us from a truly open debate on another no less evident aspect of moral life. I am thinking here of the cognitive underdetermination of every moral doctrine and the considerable diversity of opinions regarding goods, values and duties within the human community. This is no surprising realization for those who, like myself, see knowledge, i.e. the endeavour to deliver justified beliefs about the world, as a power that is by its very nature more de-realizing than functional to strengthening our contact with reality. I shall return to this at greater length below.

Seen in this light, it is not surprising that adhering to a form of moral realism should not necessarily lead to the controversial claim that a universal cognitive convergence based on the access to the objective truth of ethical bastions (whether value judgments or prescriptions) is a reachable target even if only in the long

³ As far as I can see, my take on the maddeningly difficult issue of the difference between “reality” and “existence” is largely Kantian. For a useful résumé on the topic, see W. Schwarz, “Kant’s Categories of Reality and Existence,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 2, 1987, pp. 343-346, especially p. 346: “Reality is always given, but existence is *problema*”.

run. The hypothesis that I would like to test, rather, is whether there is something in the very nature of moral “realities” that makes such an outcome highly unlikely. Mine is the burden of not so much demonstrating – this would be a task beyond my strength – as to gesture at a plausible account of moral experience that, in light of what we know about our species and the physical world in which we live, should make sense of the mediated influence exerted by stubborn moral facts upon the deliberations and conducts of moral agents.

To cut a long story short, in the view I am advocating here, the sense of reality precedes its representation. It is, in other words, a natural response to our engagement with things and agents whose behaviour is independent of our will and desire. What’s more, a consistent concept of reality as it is in itself is premised in the representationalist outlook on the possibility of having access to a “view from nowhere”, which, however, can only be the product of a counterfactual abstraction with a regulative function in the ordinary cognitive performances. The latter, in fact, are never contingent on a frontal relationship with the totality of experience.⁴ Reality as such, to sum up, cannot be an object. It is better conceived of as an environment, a tacit background, or an exploratory field.

This, at any rate, does not mean denying that there is a mutual influence between the sense of reality and the various cognitive deeds that capitalize on that original contact with what is out there. Anyone who has read without bias the engaging fifth chapter of *Mind and Cosmos* knows what I am talking about.⁵ In those pages, rowing against the current, Nagel challenges the plausibility of a neo-Darwinian view of the evolution of life and cosmos starting from an overriding insight on the reality of values, or better on the self-evidence of the realm of morality as the quintessence of what is real in people’s lives.

Value judgments and moral reasoning are part of human life, and therefore part of the factual evidence about what humans are capable of. The interpretation of faculties such as these is inescapably relevant to the task of discovering the best scientific or cosmological account of what we are and how we came into existence. What counts as a good explanation depends heavily on an understanding of what it is that has to be explained.⁶

⁴ On this point see J. McDowell, *Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World*, in Id., *Mind, Value, & Reality*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA), 1998, pp. 112-130, especially pp. 118-122.

⁵ T. Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

The daring conclusion reached by Nagel reverses the influential argument offered by Sharon Street: “since moral realism is true, a Darwinian account of the motives underlying moral judgment must be false, in spite of the scientific consensus in its favor.”⁷

Like John Dupré,⁸ I too have the impression that Nagel’s conclusion is hasty. It seems motivated less by a distrust in Darwin’s ability in accounting for life’s unity in diversity than by his impatience with a number of controversial philosophical extrapolations about the impact of the Darwinian revolution on some metaphysical imaginaries inherited by our intellectual tradition. This, however, does not undermine the force of the argumentative strategy adopted by Nagel. As far as I can see, it starts from a questionable, but non-negligible consideration. I would sum it up as follows. A substantial portion of the *Homo sapiens* species members systematically show that they possess a special kind of receptivity – answerability to moral norms – that puts them in a condition to distance themselves from self-indulgent inclinations and recognize their reasons for acting otherwise. Familiarity with values, therefore, does not arise from a representational, head-on stance towards the world that would lead to the discovery of a subset of *sui generis* facts (the domain of value). It is, rather, a recognition of a basic feature of our life-form, that, to quote an eloquent statement by Ronald Dworkin, “is self-contained and self-certifying.”⁹ In this regard, values are “as real as trees or pain.”¹⁰

The intuition is clear. But what notion or image of reality is compatible with this view of the natural attunement of human beings with “irreducibly normative facts or truths,”¹¹ which, however robust, seem to lose consistency outside their (non-contingent) embedding in the life of imaginative agents such as ourselves?

3. A SENSE FOR REALITY

⁷ Ibid., p. 105; cf. S. Street, “A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value,” *Philosophical Studies*, 1, 2006, pp. 109-166.

⁸ J. Dupré, “Review of *Mind and Cosmos*,” *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, 29 October 2012, available at: <https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/35163-mind-and-cosmos-why-the-materialist-neo-darwinian-conception-of-nature-is-almost-certainly-false/>.

⁹ See R. Dworkin, *Religion without God*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA), 2013, p. 16.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

¹¹ Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, p. 106.

In order to answer this question, some general remarks on realism are in order.¹² By it I mean, in a broad sense, the claim that we have sufficient reasons to believe that there is a world out there that is not reducible to the thoughts (concepts, images, beliefs) that have it as their reference or content. But where do these reasons come from? If I am not mistaken, they do not issue from particularly convincing justifications – which, the more refined they are, the more they appear vulnerable to sceptical doubts – but from the invitation to re-awaken a familiarity with reality that dwells in our less remarkable relations with the world and which, precisely because it lacks any drama, tends to go unnoticed.

After all, what does it mean to be born, to exist, if not to be immersed in reality, to be in contact with it? The very concept of reality (with the correlative distinction between it and appearance or delusion) presupposes a basic *sense of reality* which is not the product of a head-on view of the whole that can aspire to be included into the realm of objectivity. In its original meaning, reality can be likened to an atmosphere, a medium with which we are in contact on each side (and in this sense, neither subjective nor objective)¹³ – something that is never noticed: the “familiar” par excellence. Preceding even the distinction between inside and outside, it can be likened to the air for terrestrial animals or water for aquatic ones.¹⁴ What is familiar or well-known (*bekannt*), however, cannot become explicitly known (*erkannt*) without undergoing a radical metamorphosis.¹⁵ In point of fact, we do not entertain an epistemic relation *stricto sensu* with it. The reality, as such, is not amenable to justification: it is what it is. Nonetheless, an unproblematic contact with it is the precondition so that our cognitive relation with the various portions of the world that are delimited and thematically focused on does not spin frictionless.¹⁶

¹² For what follows see my “Realism, Relativism, and Pluralism: An Impossible Marriage?,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 4-5, 2015, pp. 413-422, from which I borrowed a few paragraphs.

¹³ On this *topos* see J. Habermas, *Von den Weltbildern zur Lebenswelt*, in Id., *Nachmetaphysisches Denken II: Aufsätze und Repliken*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M., 2012, pp. 19-53, especially pp. 20-21.

¹⁴ For an intelligent use of this image as food for thought about the risks of humans’ “natural, basic self-centeredness”, see D.F. Wallace, *This is Water*, Little, Brown, & Company, New York, 2009, p. 37.

¹⁵ On this point see my “‘What is Familiar is not Understood Precisely Because It is Familiar’: A Re-Examination of J. McDowell’s Quietism,” *Verifiche*, 1-3, 2012, pp. 103-127.

¹⁶ For a persuasive re-articulation of phenomenological realism see H. Dreyfus, C. Taylor, *Retrieving Realism*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA), 2015.

We could describe this sense of reality as an antisolipsistic or antiphenomenalist bulwark: it is the pre-thematic certainty that one does not have to do only with oneself or, in Bernard Williams' words, that in the pursuit of truth, "the struggle is with something other than oneself."¹⁷ Compared to this otherness which refuses to give in, the feeling of frustration that can be felt is very real. For it is not akin to a titanic revolt against something logically impossible (for example, that $2 + 2 = 5$ or the desire to "be monogamously married to each of four women at once"),¹⁸ but rather stems from the observation that a painful "conceivable alternative" is foreclosed to us for contingent reasons: because this is how the world is. A painful truth that we have somehow to come to terms with.

As I noted above, this basic sense of reality is usually dormant: it does not play a big role in the daily life of creatures like us who, like any other animal, are generally saturated (i.e. continually at grips) with the world around them. It is rather the unsaturability of our cognitive relationship with the world and the infinite extensibility of the connections between reasons that has a de-realizing impact on the epistemic subject. Perhaps, the example that best captures this loss of contact is the attempt to understand the cause-effect relationships apart from the agent's acquaintance with the incessant causal impingement of the environment through her own lived body. If (as it happens with special force in the modern age) this is amplified by a social environment that encourages people to take an objectifying stance towards the life-world, the feeling of being naturally in contact with a reality that does not depend on our ability to represent it or justify it can be severely undermined.

It must be emphasized, however, that a defence of realism along this line is compatible with a highly revisionist attitude towards the different regional ontologies. Indeed, once the exaggerated fear lest there may be a total disconnect between us and reality is exorcised, it is only natural to expect that the specific queries about the "consistency" of more or less complex theoretical constructs (atoms, biological species, society, love, the past, and so forth), about whose existence we are committed in our scientific or folk understanding of the world, lose much of their drama.

Hopefully, rephrasing the issue of our basic sense of reality in terms of the traditional problem of free will can be helpful. Metaphysically speaking, in the

¹⁷ B. Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ), 2002, p. 145.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

view sketched above, we are indeed free, but only situatedly free. To switch from an absolute (“negative”) to a situated (“positive”) understanding of freedom also means to relieve the anxiety that always goes together with the feeling of being released from any external, non-self-imposed constraint. Williams argued this point convincingly: “To be free, in the most basic, traditional, intelligible sense, is not to be subject of another’s will. It does not consist of being free from all obstacles. On the contrary, freedom has any value only if there is something you want to do, and if, moreover, the want you have is not one that you can change at will for another want. A central form of freedom, then, is not to be subject to another’s will in working toward something that you find worthwhile.”¹⁹

Human knowledge, precisely because it cannot operate apart from a practice of justification by reasons, has the appearance, *prima facie*, of a self-sufficient system of ideal relations. As John McDowell has claimed with good arguments in his instructive debate with Hubert Dreyfus,²⁰ imagining an “external” to the conceptual makes no sense once access is granted to the noetic realm. This is the portion of truth to be found in the coherentist theories of epistemic justification. However, this aspect of human rationality, while exposing each exercise of justification by reasons to the risk of unsaturability and rendering every theory partially undetermined, does not affect the basic sense of reality characteristic of any living being, which can always be reactivated at least obliquely (that is, with a *noluntas* gesture rather than with an authoritative act of will).

Let me illustrate this point with some examples. I may have to work hard to warrant my belief that the creature that devoured my sheep can be correctly identified as a member of the species *canis lupus*, but the fact remains that my desire that the sheep be still alive will be inevitably frustrated. I may entertain many reasonable doubts about the ontological consistency of money, about its delusional, if not “religious” nature, but that will not dissolve my worries about the state of my bank account, whose effects on my behaviour and my decisions will reactivate my natural sense of reality. Drawing attention to the power of reflectivity to undermine any claim to settle in a permanent centre of gravity does not mean to ignore the fact that such ex-centricity supervenes on the animal condition of spatio-temporally situated individuals, who are constantly at grips

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 145.

²⁰ See the exchange published in *Inquiry*, 4, 2007, pp. 338-377 and the later collection of essays edited by J.K. Schear, *Mind, Reason, and Being-in-the-World: The McDowell-Dreyfus Debate*, Routledge, London, 2013.

with the world and whose experience is full of ordinary hackneyed truths.²¹ After all, the endless search for the right distance, which characterizes the human effort to feel at home in the world, is built on this structural tension.

4. RESISTANCE: THE STUBBORNNESS OF MORAL FACT

Who wants to sidestep the zero-sum game of the controversy between realists and anti-realists ought to be aware of these different, but not mutually exclusive, levels of our relationship with the real. This does not mean ignoring the fact that, by dint of exercising the capacity to distance oneself from the world and put it into perspective, and then reflectively distance oneself from one's own point of view as well (and so forth), the impression can easily settle in that the dichotomy between external and internal, subjective and objective, mental and physical, constitutes the zero or "absolute" degree of being a minded self, with respect to which the reliability of our sense of reality should be measured or checked.²²

If we should obsessively ask ourselves about everything that we experience whether it is subjective or objective, internal or external, dependent or independent from our representations or mental patterns, the sense that the world is something irretrievably lost – a ghost lingering on the ruins of our philosophical systems – would become almost inescapable.²³ And we would rejoice or complain depending on the different circumstances, temperaments or historical periods. As a matter of fact, though, what would be lost is not exactly the world, but a pictorial or photographic picture of the world, with respect to which only a detached observer could actually enjoy an abysmal freedom and the moral subject experience the sense of an infinite responsibility.

²¹ As Karsten Harries observed about Cusanus's principle of "learned ignorance": the contingent human "center does not bind reflection. And the same can be said of the body that places us on this earth, assigns us terrestrials our point of view and provides us with a natural measuring rod"; see K. Harries, *Origins of the Modern World Picture: Cusanus and Alberti. Seminar Notes*, Princeton, 2013, p. 48, available at: <https://campuspress.yale.edu/karstenharries/files/2012/09/Origins-of-the-Modern-World-Picture.-Cusanus-and-Alberti2-1abyk3t.pdf>.

²² On this point see B. Williams, *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1978, pp. 64-66. About the reasonable disagreement (which is generally articulated in a first order dissent and some form of second order consent) as a "variable-sum game", cf. I. Testa, "I giardini culturali del relativismo," *L'ospite ingrato*, 1, 2008, pp. 59-72, in particular pp. 69-70.

²³ See R. Rorty, "The World Well Lost," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 19, 1972, pp. 649-665.

Freedom and responsibility: this coupling sounds all too familiar. What could be more ordinary for us than a subject who is willing to make any sacrifice in order to affirm freedom of choice or self-determination? Yet, on closer inspection, changing the world into an image – and the parallel relativization of one’s own viewpoint – is anything but an ordinary mental performance. It is not something that the individual can accomplish in total autonomy or spontaneity. It presupposes, among other things, a remarkable intellectualization and objectification of experience, for example through writing and embedding the thought-products in material supports that are maximally resistant to the corrosive power of time.²⁴

The philosophically most interesting and problematic step, however, is the meta-theoretical move that led to the segregation of the realm of spontaneity and agency within a non-natural space on account of their intangibility and their not being spatio-temporally located. Which, in turn, meant denying them any reality and causal efficacy. From this familiar standpoint, the suspension looks sensible and it may seem obvious that “moral facts” should take on the semblance of fabulous creatures, true metaphysical chimeras. Indeed, how can something both be a “fact” and belong to an ontological region where the properties of inertiality, stubbornness and resistance to the will are denied the pride of place?

This is notoriously the most troubling issue for the advocates of moral realism. An advantage, though, resulting from the quietist argument above is the weakening of the strictly epistemic question of whether a necessary condition for ascribing reality to something with which one makes experientially contact should be its total independence from the subject’s spontaneous agency. Since it precedes the fracture between subject and object, our sense of reality is untouched by this derivative doubt.

The point lies elsewhere: how can one envisage a form of contact with non-material realities such as values in which a variety of non-metaphorical resistance is experienced? If a personal commitment is the condition for a moral fact to constrain my behaviour and this supposes a voluntary recognition of its normative cogency, is not the denial of assent sufficient to make these alleged facts of life disappear from view? But, this being the case, how can one

²⁴ I tried to read the modern philosophical trajectory leading to the loss of the world against a Grand Narrative in “Quanto è moderno il relativismo? Il mondo messo in prospettiva e le svolte assiali dell’umanità,” *Filosofia e teologia*, 1, 2014, pp. 22-36.

legitimately claim the reality of such volatile things? What distinguishes them from fantasies or hallucinations caused by the deprivation of basic bodily needs?

The point is well taken. But it does not dig deep enough into the phenomenology of moral experience. A realist account of the stubbornness of moral facts moves back one further step and focuses on a purely receptive stage of the experience of value. This is the moment when the reality of ethics emerges under the vestige of a force field exerting a powerful influence on how life as a whole is lived and not as an object which may become the content of a that-clause. At this stage, the sense of resistance experienced by a moral agent comes down to the impossibility of reducing the contrast between the axiological polarities to the depthless and toothless alternative between the “I like it” and the “I don’t like it.” The sense of moral reality – the sense, that is, which is re-activated every time we utter a moral judgment or feel a moral sentiment – is all there. It adds up to the sense that there is no way out, that, no matter how hard we try, we cannot fill the gap dividing, for example, making or suffering an injustice or acting bravely and behaving cowardly. This is all we can get. The issue of the truth claims of specific moral evaluations or judgments is placed at another stage in thematising the moral phenomenon.

More concretely, this special sense of reality is the main resource at our disposal to comprehend the repulse felt by many when confronted with standard forms of moral nihilism or cynicism. A typical example of this stance towards life is the sovereign indifference with which Stalin regarded the victims of his crimes: “Who’s going to remember all this riff-raff in ten or twenty years’ time? No one ... Who remembers now the names of the boyars Ivan the terrible got rid of? No one. ... In the end they all got what they deserved.”²⁵ Once faced with such examples of total estrangement from the ethical substance of life, the proper response is not concocting an impeccable argument to show why we should or cannot but be moral, but dusting off our original experience as moral agents (which is encapsulated logically also in the so-called Hume’s law) that allows us to consider effortlessly such displays of insensitivity as a form of immorality rather than as the practical translation of a contestable metaethics (let’s say, an error theory).²⁶ In this sense, the contact with the moral reality (understood as a kind of gradient

²⁵ Quoted in J. Glover, *Humanity. A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*, Yale University Press, New Haven (CT), 2000, p. 256.

²⁶ On this see C. Taylor, “McDowell on Value and Knowledge,” *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 199, 2000, pp. 242-249, especially pp. 244-245.

vector field) can be seen as the ethical life's *Urphänomen*, in which the agent is aware at a pre-thematic level of the influence exerted on her agency by a realm of norms and values irreducible to the superficial and non-compelling alternative: "I like it/I don't like it."

To sum up, the sense of moral reality can be described in terms of the pre- or proto-conceptual encounter with practical normativity as a fact of human existence. Put otherwise, making contact with the space of moral reasons means entering a realm of life within which there is ample room for a robust engaged exploration, susceptible of a (non-linear) progress under the guise of an oriented, yet non-cumulative, learning process. Here, a constant reconfiguration of the tables of duties, values and of the repertoire of moral emotions available to agents can be reasonably expected, as a rule and not as an exception.

5. MORAL AGENTS IN A DARWINIAN WORLD

As is broadly known, the weight of the vocabulary, the style of reasoning and the agenda of issues that, due to a convention rarely challenged, are grouped under the name of neo-Darwinism, has grown exponentially in the philosophical debate since the 1980s. This is partly the result of the explanatory power of what Dennett famously dubbed "Darwin's dangerous idea,"²⁷ partly a contingent consequence of Darwinian evolutionism's being the only *Weltanschauung* left on the field in the West after the demise of Twentieth-century secular ideologies. It is this kind of common sense that enabled Sharon Street to speak outright of a "Darwinian" dilemma for realist theories of value in an influential article and to suggest a perfect equivalence between her selective reception of Darwin's theory and "science" as such.²⁸

So I cannot bring my argument to a close without asking whether the quietist account of morality advocated above is compatible with a Darwinian view of the

²⁷ D. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1995.

²⁸ See S. Street, *A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value*, p. 154. For a full-fledged analysis of Darwin's philosophical legacy see my *Un'idea di umanità. Etica e natura dopo Darwin*, EDB, Bologna, 2007. I argued for a "liberal" interpretation of Darwin's thought in a review of P.S. Davis's book *Subjects of the World: Darwin's Rhetoric and the Study of Agency in Nature*, published on *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, 10 October 2009 (available at: <https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/24194-subjects-of-the-world-darwin-s-rhetoric-and-the-study-of-agency-in-nature/>).

descent of man from other animal species, in whose lives it seems reasonable to assume that a robust exploration of the reality of ethics played no role whatsoever. The question is essentially how the emergence of a meaningful – although it is hard to say *how much* meaningful – novelty in the natural history of our planet can be explained in the light of the different time-frames within which human moral skills, on the one hand, and our reproductive fitness, on the other hand, made a difference. Do we perhaps kid ourselves when we emphasize the *biological* role played in human evolution by the access to a space of reasons? Couldn't it be a negligible “spandrel” in the immemorial history of life on earth?²⁹

These are challenging questions. They are especially difficult, *inter alia*, because we would need to oversee not just the past, but also the future evolution of biological organisms in order to answer them on an informed basis. Although many biologists are persuaded that there have been cases of (relative) acceleration of the process of diversification of living things in the past (think only of the so-called “Cambrian explosion”), there is no sufficient information available and, above all, no shared purely quantitative criteria to end the dispute to the satisfaction of all the contenders. Even the supposed “uniqueness” of the human species is regarded with varying degrees of scepticism depending on how people employ the category of biological “success” (which, as Darwin liked to point out, is a concept that should always be handled with care). The metaphor of the “struggle for existence”, on the other hand, is precisely that: a metaphor. There are, after all, many aspects in the appearance and behaviour of several animal species that can be traced back to a logic, so to speak, of “suasion” and ingenuity rather than brute force. This is the case, for example, of sexual selection based on cunning or “charm” (which, according to Darwin, is at the origin of the aesthetic sense in species in which the female exerts a choice) or the various forms of cooperation and non-violent competition between species. There are, furthermore, intraspecific relationship styles such as caregiving and play that, while not escaping *in toto* the selective pressure of reproductive fitness, open up spaces for individual action and creativity where freedom and agency matter more than the mechanical and impersonal pressure of natural selection.³⁰

²⁹ On the metonymical use of “spandrels” in arguing against panadaptationism, see S.J. Gould, R.C. Lewontin, “The Spandrels of San Marco and the Panglossian Paradigm: A Critique of the Adaptationist Programme,” *Proc. Roy. Soc. London. B* 205, 1161, 1979, pp. 581–598.

³⁰ On sexual selection see C. Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (or. ed. 1871), Penguin, Harmondsworth, 2004, pt. II and III; on parental care see S.B. Hrdy, *Mothers and Others: The Evolutionary Origins of Mutual Understanding*, Harvard University Press,

While there is no doubt that, during evolution's long march, natural selection played a crucial role in checking the adaptive value of the enabling conditions (agency, consciousness, emotions, semantic memory, recognition capacities, etc.) that made possible the moral experience in humans, I do not see how this widely supported evidence prevents us from seeing the emergence of a new species (or of any other taxa employed in modern biological classification) also as an opportunity to explore hitherto unknown corners of reality. It is at least *prima facie* plausible, therefore, to consider this form of spontaneity as a variety of situated freedom which results in the discovery (or re-discovery) of aspects or "isles" of reality, rather than conceptualizing it as an emerging capacity to construct portions of artificial life that are then superimposed onto the only coherent and self-sufficient reality worthy of the name. The latter being the inert and always self-identical (apart from the distribution of its parts in space) matter in motion within which the only source of change lies in the causal power of natural forces. Such a conception of reality, in fact, is no less postulatory than that which depends on a (far from unreasonable) trust in our ability to respond reliably to the (actual) affordances of our intentional environment.³¹

To offer an example familiar to the readers of this article: how can the existence of lively discussions be explained? What is, in other words, the most plausible explanation of the fact that a significant number of members of the human species invest a great deal of psychological and intellectual energies with the intent to prevail in an exchange of arguments, i.e. to be recognized as right

Cambridge (MA), 2009; on animal play see G.M. Burghardt, *The Genesis of Animal Play: Testing the Limits*, MIT Press, Cambridge (MA), 2005.

³¹ On the "materialist exclusion" see C. Taylor, *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA), 2016, pp. 204-211. For my part, I would extend the closing remark also to the phenomenon that, in the aftermath of the Darwinian Revolution, was often regarded (for understandable historical reasons) as the quintessence of human mind's projectivism: religious belief. Even if we were to agree on a moot definition of the believer's mindset as the psychological inclination to think that "there is more than meets the eye," it is hard to understand why we should be satisfied with the idea that this bent rests only on a subjective disposition, passed through the sieve of natural selection. Why not consider it, instead, as a reasonable response to the cognitive underdetermination ingrained in the experience of beings who are endowed with the ability to explore their surrounding environment and an insatiable curiosity which is non-saturable, at least at the level of mind-frames? In this sense, I see Weber's metaphor of "religiöse Unmusikalität" as more suitable to characterize a detached stance toward the question of the ultimate meaning of human existence, which he regarded as a topic more suited for "prophets" than for "professors" (with the predictable exception, incidentally, for those who helped to set up the rule).

about the matter? As far as I can see, there are three alternative interpretations at hand here. (1) It may be that the investment of energy has a direct adaptive value (which seems very difficult to prove in this case). (2) Or it may be that the investment has no direct, but only indirect adaptive value, to the extent that it is one of the many embodiments of the human impulse to dominate, which, taken individually, are indifferent with respect to their deeper motivation. (This account is close to the theoretical attitude which in philosophy usually goes under the name of “psychologism”). (3) Finally, it may be that the investment in an intangible goal is so intense because the action in which it is embedded does make contact with reality. In other words, we might be facing here a gratuitous, playful pursuit, whose satisfaction is not merely psychological. It is more like a challenge that you can win or lose *objectively* (just like a football or basketball game), and in which the main gratification comes from the fact that, while reality counters the effort, it can also yield to it, certifying the won challenge and the success of the endeavour.

If the claim that things like moral scruples (a variety of intelligence different from cunning) or romantic love (a form of personal care different from the mating drive) are mere epiphenomena of the only true reality – that is, a superficial veneer on a substance consisting of adaptive behavioural habits – does not sound sufficiently convincing, one can consider the hypothesis that the survival of non-directly-adaptive abilities may depend on the fact that the latter are strengthened from the outside by their responsiveness to a reality that is partially independent of their psychological manifestations.

There is nothing in Darwin’s outlook that is meant to stop us from articulating the insight that, in the course of biological evolution, opportunities for innovative forms of exploration of the surrounding environment have emerged and continue to emerge. They can be seen as life’s makeshift way to uncover what is hidden in the folds of reality. If we agree that the concept of reality still has a role to play in our efforts to understand ourselves and the world around us, we must be aware of how crucial to this process is the correct interpretation of the metaphor of the agent’s “grip on reality.” What is certain, however, is that the answer to this riddle is unaffected by the Darwinian explanation of the manifest diversity and underlying unity of the biosphere. We cannot expect the solution of so vexed philosophical issues to come from evolutionary biology or, let alone, from the antonym of armchair science, viz. (tacit) laboratory philosophy. The hospitality of our ontological repertoires is the key. My hunch is that this varies in proportion to

the importance we ascribe to our contact with the world and, hence, to what I have called here our basic sense of reality.

To sum up: to what extent can the metaethical position articulated in this paper be regarded as quietist? My claim, in a nutshell, is that it is quietist so long as it has the potential to exorcise the anxieties arising from thinking that an alleged Darwinian explanation of human evolution is bound to be a major obstacle to embracing a variety of moral realism that has at least the merit of making the moral subject not feel like an alien in the natural world as it has been imagined since the Scientific Revolution.

EVOLUTIONARY DEBUNKING OF NORMATIVE REALISM. NOT A REAL THREAT FOR REALISTS

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ABSTRACT

A debunking argument has been recently levelled against normative realism. According to this line of reasoning, most of our normative beliefs have been strongly influenced by evolutionary forces. As evolution is a non-truth-tracking process, this influence may lead our normative beliefs off track. If so, normative realists need to provide an explanation of how it is possible that our normative beliefs track stance-independent truth, or of how their falsity could be spotted, when evolution powerfully drives us to certain judgments. The article assesses this argument, and tries to show that it is not a real threat to normative realists. Two arguments are employed. First, it is not the case that *most of* our normative beliefs are evolution-driven. There are relevant normative views – for instance, a principle of impartiality – which are quite recalcitrant to evolutionary explanations. Second, if the supervenience of normative on the non-normative holds, then most of our current normative beliefs track truth in the actual world and in the closest possible worlds. As a consequence, the debunking argument amounts either to the trivial remark that the truth of few beliefs is unsafe, or to a standard sceptical argument focusing on the merely logical possibility of epistemic errors.

KEYWORDS

Evolution, normative realism, debunking argument, supervenience, justification, truth.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the so-called *debunking argument*, most of our normative beliefs are strongly influenced by evolutionary forces. As evolution is a non-truth-tracking process, this influence may lead our normative beliefs off track. If so, normative realists need to provide an explanation of how is it possible that our normative beliefs track stance-independent truths, or of how their falsity could be spotted, even though evolution powerfully drives us to certain judgments.

Contrary to appearances, the debunking argument is not a real threat to normative realists. Two arguments support this conclusion. First, it is not the case that *most* of our normative beliefs are evolution-driven. Indeed, there are relevant normative views – for instance, a principle of impartiality – which are quite recalcitrant to evolutionary explanations. Second, if normative truths supervene on non-normative truths, then most of our current normative beliefs track truth in the actual world, and in the nearest possible worlds. If so, the debunking argument either amounts to the trivial remark that the truth of few normative beliefs is unsafe, or it reduces to the standard skeptical argument focusing on the mere logical possibility of epistemic errors. In both cases, it cannot be a real threat to normative realism.

There is a growing discussion on the debunking argument.¹ In § 2, I provide a detailed presentation of the debunking argument, mapping it onto the present debate. In § 3 I reject the debunking argument, showing how some of its premises are not valid. In § 4 I draw a general conclusion, as follows. The debunking argument is not a real threat to realists, because either it is a very weak challenge to the epistemic status of some specific normative views, or it is a mere repetition of usual skeptical doubts. In both cases, realists can easily reply, either by listing views able to resist debunking or by deploying the usual anti-skeptical arguments.²

2. THE DEBUNKING ARGUMENT FULLY SPECIFIED

2.1. A general version of the debunking argument

¹ See (Carruthers and James 2008; Clarke-Doane 2012, 2016; Crisp 2006, 89–90; Dworkin 1996, 2011, chaps. 2–4; Enoch 2011, 164–5; FitzPatrick 2014; Fletcher 2007; Greene 2008, 2013, Part II; Handfield 2016; Huemer 2008; Kahane 2011; Kitcher 2006; Lazari-Radek and Singer 2014, 178–84, 195–6; Lillehammer 2003; Mogensen 2015a, [b] 2015; Nagel 1997, chaps. 1, 2, 6, 7, 2012, chaps. 4–5; Nozick 1981, 345; Parfit 1984, 186, 308, 2011, §§ 114, 188–19, 2017, §§ 160–4; Pinker 2006; Rachels 2003, 13–5; Rachels and Alter 2005; Shafer-Landau 2012; Singer 1974, 516, 1982, 2011, 2005; Skarsaune 2011; Sinnott-Armstrong 2006, 40–5; Tersman 2008, 2016; Vavova 2014, 2015, 2016; White 2010; Wielenberg 2010, 2016; Wilkins and Griffiths forthcoming; Woods 2016). Alvin Plantinga presented a somewhat parallel argument – with different aims (a critique of evolutionary epistemology); see (Plantinga 1993, chap. 2); other scholars have addressed the debunking arguments to religion and religious beliefs; see (Barrett 2011; Bering 2011; Murray 2009; Plantinga 2011; Thurow 2011) and cp. (Nagel 2012, 135 n. 13; Mason 2010; Shafer-Landau 2007; Wielenberg 2016; Wilkins and Griffiths forthcoming). I shall not consider this topic, here.

² On the connection between the debunking argument and various forms of skepticism, see (Bedke 2014; Clarke-Doane 2016, 27; Enoch 2011, 158–9, 163–4, 167; FitzPatrick 2014; Kahane 2011, 114–20; Joyce 2016b; Nagel 2012, 77; Schafer 2010; Shafer-Landau 2007, 2012; Sher 2001, § 3; Tersman 2008, 400–3; Vavova 2014, 2016; White 2010; Wielenberg 2010, 457).

Consider:

Gallic rain: Jones believes that it rained in France today. Actually, today France was hit by a torrential downpour. However, Jones's belief has not been caused by his perception of this fact, by reliable testimony, or by other proper means of acquaintance (such as TV news, newspaper reports, information from qualified observers, and so on). Rather, Jones has been hypnotized by somebody who had no knowledge of Gallic rain.³

A standard reaction to *Gallic rain* is to declare *unjustified* Jones' belief that it rained in France today.⁴ This reaction presupposes

TRUTH DETERMINES JUSTIFIED BELIEFS (TDB): *Ceteris paribus*, a belief is justified when its truth-makers *uniquely determine* its presence. We believe what we believe because certain facts make our beliefs true. Had the facts been otherwise, we would have believed something else.⁵

A consequence of TDB is that when a belief is determined by something different from its truth-makers, and especially by something that does not *covary* with them, its justification may be challenged. The hypnotist's influx

³ This case is in (Dworkin 2011, 71). See also (Bedke 2014, § 3.1; Enoch 2011, 159–60; Joyce 2005, 179–81, [b] 2016, 157–8, 162, 170–3; Parfit 2017, 265, 287–88; Shafer-Landau 2012, 17; Street 2008, 214–5).

⁴ If Jones' *knowledge* that it rained in France today is considered, then some authors would claim that he doesn't properly know this fact; see (Gettier 1963; Leiter 2004; Vavova 2015, 113 n. 4; White 2010, 596–7). Here, I shall focus only on justification; see (Bedke 2014, § 2; Clarke-Doane 2016; FitzPatrick 2014, 890–1; Kahane 2011, 104, 108, 121 n. 4 and 8; Lillehammer 2010, 362; Shafer-Landau 2007, 2012; Vavova 2015, 104; White 2010; Woods 2016). For a focus on knowledge, see (FitzPatrick 2014, 891 n. 9, 900 n. 18; Shafer-Landau 2012, 4; Tersman 2016; Wielenberg 2010, 441, 447, 452–3). Notice that claims about knowledge of facts such as that it rained in France today do not imply claims about the very existence and ontological status of this fact, or of facts or truths in general. I shall not consider metaphysical issues of this sort here, even though something will be passingly said in § 3.2; see (Enoch 2011, 153–8, 161–2; Sinnott-Armstrong 2006, 44). For a focus on reliability, see (Clarke-Doane 2012, 2014, 2015, 2016; Enoch 2011, 161–2; FitzPatrick 2014, 885; Handfield 2016, § 4.3; Shafer-Landau 2012; Tersman 2008, 2016; Vavova 2016, 9–11, 16; White 2010, 590; Wielenberg 2010, 447–8, 450–1, 2016, § 5.4). See also (Joyce 2016b, 156).

⁵ For my purposes here, a truth-maker is everything makes a belief true, and provides a reason for this belief – I don't need here to specify whether such a thing is a state of affairs, an event, a proposition, the coherent relation of the belief with other beliefs, or its warranted assertability, and so on and so forth. Notice that TDB establishes a connection between truth-makers and beliefs, not between *causes* of believing and beliefs. Whether these two connections should covary is the issue this article focuses on. Cp. (FitzPatrick 2014, 895 n. 16; Joyce 2016b; Vavova 2016, 3; White 2010).

acts as an *undercutting defeater* or an *underminer* for the belief that it rained in France today – i.e. as a ground for doubting that this belief is justified.⁶

Consider:

Reciprocity. Jones believes that the fact that someone has treated him well is a reason to treat that person well in return. This normative belief is actually true. However, Jones' belief has been caused not by his perception of such a truth, or by reliable testimony, or by other purportedly proper means of acquaintance (such as rational reflection, deliverances of moral conscience, or intuition, and so on). Rather, Jones believes that reciprocity is reasonable because he inherited certain elementary pro-attitudes towards reciprocity, and these inherited traits, in their turn, are the upshots of natural selection, for reciprocal behavior brings about adaptive benefits.

Reciprocity can elicit a similar reaction as *Gallic rain*. Jones' belief in reciprocity may be undermined, as it is not determined by its truth-makers: evolutionary forces cause it; it is not the rightness of reciprocity that causes it. Evolution acts as an undercutting defeater for the belief that reciprocity is right.

Some authors generalize *Reciprocity*. They affirm that there are evolution-based reasons to claim that *most of*⁷ our normative beliefs act as Jones' belief in reciprocity. From this, they derive a challenge against non-naturalist, or *robust*, normative realism (the view that at least certain normative beliefs report stance-independent truths, and these truths are non-natural truths).⁸

⁶ See (Joyce 2016b, 147–9; Vavova 2016, 3). On undercutting defeaters or underminers, see (Clarke-Doane 2016, 25; Huemer 2008, 380–1; Joyce 2016b, 157; Kahane 2011, 105–6; Pollock and Cruz 1999, 36–7, 196–7) cp. also (Mogensen 2015a; Shafer-Landau 2012, 8; Wielenberg 2016, § 5.2). The *knowledge* of the hypnotist's influx may be distinguished from the *fact* that the hypnotist had an influx. It might be argued either that the *knowledge* is a defeater or that the very *fact, even if not known*, undermines the belief in Gallic rain; see (White 2010, § 2), and cp. (Clarke-Doane 2016; Joyce 2016b; Vavova 2016; Wielenberg 2016). In what follows, I shall not take this distinction into account.

⁷ See n. 13 below.

⁸ On the debunking argument as a generalization process, see (Mason 2010, 774; White 2010, § 1). Generally, the debunkers maintain that their challenge hits robust internalist realism about practical reasons, whereas it is not clear that it can be addressed to other sorts of realisms, to anti-realist views, or to realism about epistemic reasons; see (Bedke 2014, § 2; Clarke-Doane 2012, 323, 2016, 25; Copp 2008, 189, 191–2; Enoch 2011, 161; Joyce 2005, 182, 243 n. 5; Nagel 2012, 72, 102; Shafer-Landau 2007, 316, 2012, 4 and n. 5, 27, 31; Sinnott-Armstrong 2006, 43; Street 2006, 111–12, 135–41, 2008, 225, 2016, 7; Shafer-Landau 2012; Wielenberg 2010, 456). However, some writers claim that the challenge can be addressed also to naturalist realism or to some forms of anti-realism; see (Bedke 2014, § 2; Enoch 2011, 165; FitzPatrick 2014, 891 n. 10, 901 n. 20; Kahane 2011, 112–3, 122 n. 31–32; Parfit 2017, § 161;

The objection is that non-naturalist normative realism is unable to explain away the undermining impact of evolutionary forces on the justification of our normative beliefs. Among others, M. Ruse, R. Joyce, and more recently S. Street have proposed specific versions of this objection.⁹ This argument is often called *the evolutionary debunking* argument, as its main upshot is to debunk a realist understanding of normative beliefs. The authors who endorse it are called the *debunkers*. A debunking explanation of a view is an explanation that does not entail that the *explanans* is true, or even likely to be true, and this authorizes doubts on the justification of the *explanandum*, thereby explaining it away.¹⁰ If our normative beliefs, the debunkers claim, can be explained as the upshot of evolutionary forces, then no reference to their truth-makers is needed to account for them. Hence, normative realism – understood as the view that normative truths are possible, and indeed relevant – is unsupported.

2.2. A detailed version of the debunking argument

A detailed version of the debunking argument sketched in § 2.1. above can be detailed as follows (arabic numbers refer to content relations among correlated claims. Logical inferences among the steps of the argument are indicated in brackets, when necessary):

Shafer-Landau 2012, 14, 25; Street 2006, 139–41, 163 n. 57, 2008, 224–5, 2016, 8). For a parallel challenge against normative realism about epistemic reasons, see (Street 2009) on which see (Enoch 2011, n. 54 to ch. 7; Evers 2015; Parfit 2011, vol. 2, § 114), and cp. (Kahane 2011, 107). For an extension of the evolutionary challenge to mathematical realism, see (Clarke-Doane 2012); see also (Enoch 2011, 160; Woods 2016) On the debunking argument, cognitivism and non-cognitivism, see (Joyce 2016c; Mason 2010). On the debunking argument and objectivism, see (Kahane 2011).

⁹ This objection may be reviving some worries emerged since the very appearance of evolutionary accounts of our views of normative reasons, possibly beginning with Darwin himself; see (Joyce 2005; Kahane 2011, 103, 105; Lazari-Radek and Singer 2014, 174–6; Lillehammer 2010; Ruse 1986, 252–4; Vavova 2014, 1). Here, I am going to focus on Sharon Street’s formulation: see (Street 2006, 2008, 2009, 2016). See also (Gibbard 1990, 107–8, 2003, § 13; Greene 2008; Huemer 2008, 376–7, 384; Joyce 2000, 2001, 158, 2005, 179–219, 2008, [a] 2016, [d] 2016; Kitcher 2006; Levy 2006; Ruse and Wilson 1986; Singer 2005, 345, 347–51, 2011, 62–3, 68–72, 84–5, 150, 194–6, 204; Sober 1994a; Wilkins and Griffiths forthcoming).

¹⁰ See (Mason 2010, 771; Tersman 2008, 395, 2016, § 3.2; Woods 2016, § 3). The debunking argument should be distinguished by more general challenges, as the mention of elements prompting reassessment of one’s own grounds for belief, or the presence of reasonable disagreement; see (Handfield 2016, § 4.5.2; Mogensen 2015a; Sher 2001, § 4; Vavova 2016; White 2010, 577–9, 587, 605–8). For very general versions of the debunking argument, see (Leiter 2004; Kahane 2011; Mason 2010; Shafer-Landau 2012, 26; Sher 2001, § 1).

Debunking Argument

Assume that the following claims are true:

1. EVOLUTION: **i.** Natural selection causes the emergence of traits (such as the tendency to put forward and endorse certain kind of views about normative reasons) contributing to the reproductive success of their holders.¹¹ **ii.** Adaptive fittingness (i.e. contribution to reproductive success) is the only factor able to determine selection. Natural selection is a non-truth-tracking process.¹²

2. EVOLUTIONARY NORMATIVITY: Most of our normative beliefs – the ones “most deeply and widely held [...] across both time and culture” (Street 2006, 116) – are very likely naturally selected – or partially and successively modified versions of similar previous normative beliefs, more simple and elementary, which are very likely to have been naturally selected.¹³ Our actual normative beliefs may have been developed out of cultural influences or prompted by rational reflection. However, their content has been somewhat indirectly

11 Here, I am not concerned with possible alternative accounts of natural selection, nor do I mean to challenge the validity of such different accounts. For some presentations of them, see (Alexander 1987; Barkow, Cosmides, and Tooby 1992; Buss 2011; Dawkins 2006; Gibbard 1990, 24, 26–8, chap. 4, 7, 8; Haidt 2001, 2012; Kitcher 2011; Mackie 1978; Ridley 1997; Singer 2005, 333–42, 2011, chaps. 1, 2; Sober 1985; Wright 1994; Wilson 1993). These accounts are usually taken for granted by the debunkers, and I shall do the same here (but see the reservations on the implications drawn from them voiced in § 3 below). The debunking argument focusses on the consequences of assuming that at least one of these accounts could be true. It does not inquiry whether this assumption is plausible or not. See (Clarke-Doane 2012, 339, 2016; Copp 2008, 186, 190; Gibbard 1990, 29–30; Joyce 2016b; Kahane 2011, 111; Street 2006, 112–3, 127–8; Skarsaune 2011, 233–4; Sinnott-Armstrong 2006, 40–3; Vavova 2015, 104).

12 See (Bedke 2014, § 2; Greene 2003; Joyce 2005, chap. 6, [b] 2016; Kahane 2011, 111; Mason 2010, 773–4; Rachels and Alter 2005, 315; Ruse 1986, 252, 2006; Shafer-Landau 2012, 22; Street 2006, 157–8 n. 13).

13 The qualifiers ‘most of’ and ‘at least in part’ in **2** account for the fact that an evolutionary account of our cognitive abilities, and hence of our views of normative reasons, does not need to posit that *every* observable trait of our reasoning normative faculties *directly* derives from natural selection. A room for other non-selective or partially selective causes may be allowed: cp. (Bedke 2014, § 2; Dworkin 2011, chap. 4; Enoch 2011, 165; Gibbard 1990, 28–30; Kahane 2011, 118; Street 2006, 113, 2016, 2). On the distinction between evolutionary explanations of (the disposition to voice) specific judgments and evolutionary explanations of broader normative capacities, see (Boniolo 2006, 28; FitzPatrick 2014; Wielenberg 2010, 444). Here, I do not consider the evolutionary debunking arguments addressed to our general capacity to have normative beliefs; see, for instance, (Haidt and Joseph 2004; Handfield 2016, § 4.1; Joyce 2005). My arguments are not to be understood as providing a direct rebuttal of these arguments; see (Bedke 2014, § 2). See also (Joyce 2016e).

influenced by previous naturally selected normative tendencies. An evolutionary story is the best explanation of our views about normative reasons, and of their continuity with more elementary normative judgments spread also among non-human animals, which can be seen as proto-versions of the more refined normative views entertained by humans. The latter have been directly selected, and their presence indirectly influenced finer and later refinements of them. This influence cannot be purged through rational reflection, at least if claim 7 below is true, as nothing – no independent starting point, no perspective, no theoretical first principle – can be immune to the distorting influence of evolutionary forces.¹⁴

2a. DETERMINATION: Natural selection *uniquely* determines the content of most of our normative beliefs. We believe what we believe because we evolved as we evolved. Had some of the evolutionary factors been different, we wouldn't have the same set of normative judgments we now make. Consider a possible world where evolutionary forces were different from those acting in the actual world. Call such a world a *distant evolutionary possible world*. In each and every distant evolutionary possible world the normative basic views of non-human and human animals could be different from those obtaining in the actual world. As a consequence, in each and every distant evolutionary possible world the full-fledged, reflexive, and refined normative views of human beings would be different from those we have in the actual world. (By 2.)¹⁵

3. SUCCESS: Most of our normative beliefs are true.¹⁶

14 See (Copp 2008, 187–90, 193; Joyce 2005; Kitcher 1993, 2006; Ruse 1986; Sober and Wilson 1998; Sinnott-Armstrong 2006, 43; Street 2006, 124, 2008, 209). On the continuity between non-human and human animals' normative views, see (Waal 1996); see also (Clarke-Doane 2012, 318–9; Kahane 2011, 107, 119; Sher 2001, 74–5; Skarsaune 2011, 230; Street 2009, 226, 234; Vavova 2015, 104). Doubts about 2 have been raised; see, for instance, (FitzPatrick 2014, 886–89, 893–4, 899–901; Parfit 2011, vols. 2, 535; Shafer-Landau 2012, 7 and n. 6, 19–20, 24–5).

15 See (Street 2006, 119–21, 2016, 2). (Lillehammer 2010, 366) traces 2a back to (Darwin 2004, 122). For the idea of a distant possible evolutionary world, see (Enoch 2011, 173–5; Vavova 2016, 9). Cp. also n. 59 below.

16 Cp. (Sinclair and Leibowitz 2016, § 1.3). SUCCESS is a tenet endorsed by many realists – see (Brink 1989, 17–22; Enoch 2011, 4; Fitzpatrick 2008, 161; Rosen 1994, 281; Sayre-McCord 2015); for a more nuanced view, see (Shafer-Landau 2003, 16–17; Skarsaune 2011, 236). However, SUCCESS may be understood as a neutral tenet – as the idea that under the first-person practical perspective, we cannot but believe that some of our normative beliefs are true, without thereby assuming a realist view of truth: see (Street 2006, 110–11, 141, 152, 2016, § 1,

4. **NORMATIVE REALISM:** **a.** *descriptivism*: normative assertoric claims (i.e. claims concerning reasons; from now onwards **Nc**) are to be interpreted literally, and, when so interpreted, they offer *descriptions* of their objects; **b.** *success*: some **Nc** offer accurate descriptions (i.e. they state genuine facts) and are therefore true; **c.** *cognitivism*: sincere **Nc** express beliefs about their objects; **d.** *metaphysical normative realism*: there exist entities corresponding to some of the terms and claims conveyed by **Nc**; **e.** *robust normative realism*: the entities mentioned sub **d.** are *robustly* mind- or stance-independent: they are independent of our beliefs, attitudes and thoughts about them (even though not necessarily unrelated to some attitudes), and causally inert; **f.** *epistemological optimism*: some of our current beliefs, as expressed in some **Nc**, are justified.¹⁷

5. **TRACKING AS SENSITIVITY:** A belief tracks a truth when, in a possible world where truth-makers were different, the belief would change accordingly. If a belief that *p* exists in the closest possible world where *p* is false, this beliefs is *insensitive*.¹⁸

2017). This is the reason for which I listed the neutral version of SUCCESS as claim 3 and the realist one as claim 4b.

17 Cp. (Sinclair and Leibowitz 2016, § 1.3.). Antirealists can agree that normative truths are independent of *specific* or *particular* actual, or even hypothetical, attitudes, but not of the whole set of attitudes or stances; see (Clarke-Doane 2012, 318; Kirchin 2012, 22; Nagel 2012, chap. 5; Shafer-Landau 2003, 15–7; Street 2006, 110, 111, 137–8, 152, 156 and n. 2, 2008, 208, 214, 218, 223, 2009, 213–6, 2016, 3–6 and especially n. 8, 2017; Wedgwood 2007). *Normative* realism as understood here is wider than *moral* or *evaluative* realism, and the latter are to be considered as subsumed under the former. In the scholarship on the debunking argument, some authors focus on moral realism (Copp 2008; Wielenberg 2010), some on evaluative realism (Street 2006), some others on normative realism (Bedke 2014, § 2; Street 2006, 2008, 209, 218, 222). For debunkers' take on realism, see (Clarke-Doane 2012, 315–8; Copp 2008, 191; Handfield 2016, § 4.1; Kahane 2011, 103–4; Shafer-Landau 2007, 2012, 1; Skarsaune 2011, 238–42; Street 2006, 110–12, 2016; Tersman 2016, § 3.2; Vavova 2015, 106, 113 n. 2; Woods 2016, § 1). On realism in general, see (Brink 1989; Enoch 2011; Fitzpatrick 2008; Kirchin 2012; Kramer 2009; Rosen 1994; Sayre-McCord 2015; Shafer-Landau 2003; Wedgwood 2007). On the issue of the causal powers of moral facts, see (Shafer-Landau 2007, 317–22, 2012, 27–8).

18 On the idea of tracking the truth, see (Nozick 1981). For the application of this idea to the present topic, and for the notion of 'sensitivity', see (Bedke 2014; Clarke-Doane 2012, 318–9, 2016, 26; Crisp 2006, 94; Enoch 2011, n. 11 to ch. 7; FitzPatrick 2014; Joyce 2005, 183, [b] 2016; Kahane 2011, 105; Lillehammer 2010, 365; Mogensen 2015b, § 4.2.; Ruse and Wilson 1986, 186–7; Shafer-Landau 2012, 2–3, 15–20; Sinnott-Armstrong 2006, 46; Street 2006, 132; White 2010, 580; Wielenberg 2016, § 5.3).

6. JUSTIFIED BELIEFS TRACK TRUTHS: *Ceteris paribus*, a belief is justified when it tracks its truth-makers. Insensitive beliefs lack sufficient justification.¹⁹

6a. REALIST TRACKING: Most of our normative beliefs track stance-independent normative truths. Then, they are justified. (By **4**, **5**, and **6**.)

7. OFF-TRACKING: Consider a possible world where **a.** evolutionary forces are the same, but **b.** normative truth-makers are different from the ones obtaining in the actual world. Call this world a *distant normative possible world*. Claims **1.ii**, **2a**, and **5** above give reasons to think that in each and every distant normative possible world our normative beliefs would remain the same. To put it otherwise, it is not necessarily true that a distant normative possible world must be a distant evolutionary possible world. Thus, there are reasons to think that evolutionary forces do not track attitude-independent normative truths, and indeed systematically keep the beliefs they cause off-track – thereby making them unjustified.²⁰

From now onwards, I shall call claims **1**, **2**, **2a** the *evolutionary claims*, whereas **4**, and **6a** will be referred to as the *realist claims*. These claims provide the ground to mount the following:

DARWINIAN DILEMMA AGAINST NORMATIVE REALISM (DDR): If the evolutionary claims, the realist claims and claim **7** are true, then claim **3** is to be false – or better, it is unwarranted: we cannot be justified in maintaining that (most of) our normative beliefs are

¹⁹ TDB (stated in § 2.1. above) and claim **6** in the main text are related in obvious ways. The former involves the latter, even though the latter does not entail the former. If a belief is determined by its truth-makers, then it tracks the truth. However, tracking is not full-fledged determination. In order to have tracking we only need necessary co-variance. Of course, determination, and especially causal determination, entails necessary co-variance. However, it remains to be proved that necessary co-variance requires, or entails, determination, or even causal determination; on this see (Joyce 2016b). A criticism of **6** is in (Vogel 2007); cp. (Shafer-Landau 2012, 2–3; White 2010, 581). **6** would be resisted by epistemic internalists, especially by coherentists; see (Handfield 2016, n. 14).

²⁰ See (Handfield 2016, § 4.3; Street 2006, 121, 124–5, 140); see also (Evers 2015, 3670; Huemer 2008, 379; Kahane 2011, 105; Shafer-Landau 2012, 15). The idea of a distant normative possible world is implicitly referred to in (Street 2006, 133). More explicit treatments are in (Joyce 2001, 163; Ruse 1986, 254; Sinnott-Armstrong 2006, 46; Street 2008, 208). See also (Bedke 2014, § 2; Dworkin 2011) and references at n. 60 below. My presentation of the debunking argument is indebted to (Bedke 2014, § 1; Shafer-Landau 2012, 4–5, 9; Vavova 2014, 2015, 107–8; Wielenberg 2010, 454, 462).

true.²¹ The evolutionary claims show that our normative beliefs do not track stance-independent truths, because they would change in a distant evolutionary possible world, independently of normative facts of the matter – namely, they would track our attitudes, rather than stance-independent truths. Hence, in light of claim **6a** above, our normative beliefs are not justified. As a consequence, either we deny the evolutionary claims, the realist claims, and claim **7**, or we deny that we have sufficient justification for our normative beliefs – i.e. that we have sufficient justification to hold claim **3**. To put it more simply, either we deny the evolutionary claims, the realist claims, and claim **7**, or we deny claim **3**.²² However, the evolutionary claims and claim **7** seem independently compelling. Accordingly, we should reject claim **3**. But this would be an implausible skeptical result.²³ We could avoid skepticism by discarding the realist claims. The evolutionary claims, claim **3** and claim **7** can be consistently true, if a different view of justification and truth is endorsed. Consider the following alternative versions of claims **4** and **6a** above:

4*. ANTI-REALISM: Truth is a function of agents' normative attitudes or stances.²⁴

6a*. ANTI-REALIST TRACKING: Most of our normative beliefs reliably track stance-dependent normative truths. Then, they are justified. (By **3**, **4***, **5**, and **6**.)

Claims **4*** and **6a*** can block skepticism. If normative truth is a function of our attitudes and stances, then it is also a function of the evolutionary influences on them. Accordingly, evolution and truth easily align.²⁵ If forces blind to stance-independent truths have caused our normative beliefs, then

21 A focus on justification is in (Joyce 2005, 179–82, 215; Copp 2008, 191, 193, 197; Sober 1994b, 107). By contrast, Street often puts the dilemma in terms of truth and falsity; see (Street 2006, 125, 2008, 2016). See n. 5 above, and (Clarke-Doane 2012, 323 n. 28; Nagel 2012, 103; Rachels 2003, 14; Shafer-Landau 2007; Wielenberg 2010, 442, 454 n. 48, 462).

22 As (Kahane 2011, 110) points out, there is a difference between a normative view being unjustified and the belief that this view is justified being unjustified (between first-order error and second-order evidence of error). The debunking argument concerns the latter belief. From now onwards, I shall let this difference unnoticed; cp. also (Alston 1980; Vavova 2016, 4–5, 9; White 2010, 577–8, 581, 600–1).

23 See (Copp 2008, 187, 191–2, 194, 196; Lillehammer 2010; Joyce 2016b; Street 2006, 122, 140, 155, 2008, 208, 210, 215, 2016, 6; Vavova 2015, 105).

24 **4*** is a minimal formulation of anti-realism, the only needed to my purposes here.

25 See (Copp 2008, 187; Street 2006, 135, 152–5, 2008, 208–9, 225, 2016, 2, 6); cp. also (Kahane 2011, 112; Lillehammer 2010, 374–7; Nagel 2012, 71–2, 102–3, 105; Shafer-Landau 2012, 13–4). A similar anti-realist strategy is in (Sher 2001, § 6).

normative realism cannot be true. Then, either we endorse skepticism, or we should provide an explanation of how both evolutionary accounts and normative realism can be true. Positing a happy coincidence (we have been caused to believe the truth by forces blind to truth, as a matter of sheer luck) is deeply implausible.²⁶ Claiming that natural selection is causally dependent from stance-independent normative truths, whose perception produces adaptive benefits, would amount to deny claim **1ii**. Then, either the evolutionary claims or the realist claims should go. If the former are taken as *prima facie* plausible, then the latter should go. If an evolutionary explanation of our normative beliefs is possible, then normative realism is debunked. If realism is endorsed, an evolutionary explanation of our normative beliefs should be rejected. Claiming that there is no relation between evolutionary forces and realist truth amounts to surrender, and to letting normative truth unexplained.²⁷

The debunking argument and the ensuing dilemma rest on two crucial premises – claims **2a** and **7** above. In the following section, I argue that these premises are not inescapable. As a consequence, the case against normative realism that the debunkers produce is weaker than it might appear.

3. CHALLENGING THE PREMISES OF THE DARWINIAN DILEMMA

In this section, I claim that, as stated above, **2a** is false, and only a much weaker version of it is true (I shall call **2a*** the weaker version of **2a**), whereas **7** is false in any possible statement of it. If I am right, then the debunking argument has a much weaker impact on normative realism than many debunkers thought.

3.1. Impartiality cannot be debunked. Vs. 2a.

²⁶ See (Street 2006, 142–4, 2008, 208, 211, 214). On the claim that a mere coincidence between evolutionary-driven beliefs and their truth is too much of a fluke – it is an unlikely luck – to be a viable hypothesis, see (Bedke 2014; Clarke-Doane 2012, 321–3, 2016, 30; Dworkin 1996, 125, 2011; Enoch 2011, 160, 164–8; FitzPatrick 2014; Mogensen 2015b, § 4.2.; Shafer-Landau 2007, 2012, 2–4, 9–32; White 2010, 589, 592–605; Wielenberg 2010, 458–61, 2016, § 5.5).

²⁷ See (Street 2006, 2008, 2009, 232–6, 240–2, 2016); cp. also (Clarke-Doane 2012, 315; Enoch 2011, 163, 166–8, n. 20 to ch. 7; Tersman 2016, § 3.2).

2a is an extremely ambitious empirical claim.²⁸ It concerns the impact of evolution on the emergence and the content of most of our normative views. Its role in the debunking argument depends on two of its features. First, **2a** establishes the *scope* of the influence of evolutionary forces on our normative views. The thought is that *most of* our normative views are influenced by evolution. This makes the issue urgent for realists, as they cannot escape the request to explain how these normative views can be true, despite the causes of them not tracking stance-independent truths (as it is suggested by the view of the evolutionary process expressed in **1.ii.**). Second, **2a** establishes that evolutionary forces are the *unique* determinant of most of our normative views. As Streets often affirms, this does not amount to rule out non-evolutionary factors of our normative views, such as rational reflection, cultural change, and the like. However, the thought is that a change in the evolutionary background *necessarily* determines a change in the normative views. In my statement of **2a** in § 2 above I put this idea in terms of the following counterfactual: in a distant evolutionary possible world, people's normative views would be different from the ones we have in the actual world. In this subsection, I take on only the first feature – the *scope* claim. I consider the second feature – the *counterfactual claim* – in the next subsection.²⁹

The reasoning in favor of **2a** may be expressed as follows.

a. Certain psychological traits direct the behavior of their possessors in ways that enhance reproductive success. It is very likely that these traits emerged and have been selected during evolution.

b. The traits mentioned in **a.** are proto-versions of certain normative views now currently diffused. Samples of them are the following judgments:

“(1) The fact that something would promote one's survival is a reason in favor of it.

(2) The fact that something would promote the interests of a family member is a reason to do it.

(3) We have greater obligations to help our own children than we do to help complete strangers.

(4) The fact that someone has treated one well is a reason to treat that person well in return.

²⁸ See (Kahane 2011, 111; Nagel 2012, 101, 1997, 110–11; Sher 2001, 67; Skarsaune 2011, 230; Shafer-Landau 2012, 1–2, 18; Vavova 2015).

²⁹ A similar distinction, between the extent of evolutionary influence and the impact of this influence, were realism true, is in (Shafer-Landau 2012, 9).

(5) The fact that someone is altruistic is a reason to admire, praise, and reward him or her.

(6) The fact that someone has done one deliberate harm is a reason to shun that person or seek his or her punishment.” (Street 2006, 115)³⁰

c. Judgments (1)-(6) have been uniquely determined by evolutionary forces. (By **a-b**).

d. Judgments (1)-(6) prevail and constitute a great part of our current normative views.

Claim **2a** descends from **a-d** above. In her statement of the debunking argument, Sharon Street clearly indicates what one needs to affirm in order to disconfirm **2a** and the reasoning leading to it. Street writes,

Consider the following possible evaluative judgments:

(1’) The fact that something would promote one’s survival is a reason against it.

(2’) The fact that something would promote the interests of a family member is a reason not to do it.

(3’) We have greater obligations to help complete strangers than we do to help our own children.

(4’) The fact that someone has treated one well is a reason to do that individual harm in return.

(5’) The fact that someone is altruistic is a reason to dislike, condemn, and punish him or her.

(6’) The fact that someone has done deliberate harm is a reason to seek out that person’s company and reward him or her.

If judgments like these – one that would, other things being equal, so clearly decrease, rather than increase, the reproductive success of those who made them – predominated among our most deeply and widely held evaluative judgments across both time and cultures, then this would constitute powerful evidence that the content of our evaluative judgments have not been greatly influenced by Darwinian selective pressures. But these are not the evaluative judgments we tend to see; instead, among our most deeply and widely held judgments, we observe many like those on the first list – many with exactly the sort of content one would expect if the content of our evaluative judgments had been heavily influenced by selective pressures. In this way, the observed

³⁰ See also (Axelrod 1984; Buss 2011; Hamilton 1963, [a] 1964, [b] 1964; Sober and Wilson 1998; Trivers 1971); cp. (Dawkins 2006; Haidt 2001; Huemer 2008, 376; Ruse 1986, 145–7).

patterns in the actual content of human evaluative judgments provide evidence in favor of the view that natural selection has had a tremendous influence on that content. (Street 2006, 116–7)

Street's suggestion is that claim **2a** can be disconfirmed by challenging **d** above. Assume that normative views whose tendency is non-adaptive, or even counter-adaptive, are currently endorsed. I call non-adaptive or counter-adaptive, views “such that it will confer either no advantage or even a disadvantage for a given kind of creature to be able to grasp them.” (Street 2006, 130) Evolution cannot explain the presence of these views, of course. So, they need a different explanation – a non-evolutionary one. If these views are sufficiently diffused, or relevant, within our current normative perspective, then **d** should be weakened, or qualified – it is no longer true that judgments (1)–(6) prevail and constitute a great part of our normative views. Thus it is not the case that *most of* our normative views are uniquely determined by evolution. If

d*. Judgments (1)–(6) *do not* prevail and *do not* constitute a great part of our current normative views. Rather, they are a peripheral, or somewhat local, part of our current normative views

is true, then from **a-c** and **d***, we obtain

2a*. WEAK DETERMINATION: Evolution *uniquely* determines the content of *some of* our normative beliefs. We believe *some of* what we believe because we evolved as we evolved. In a distant evolutionary possible world, *some of* our normative beliefs would change. The only plausible explanation of the presence and the content of *some of* our normative beliefs is an evolutionary one.³¹

Street contends that judgments (1)–(6) prevail in our normative perspective, and that there are no plausible counter-adaptive judgments among our “most deeply and widely held judgments”. Therefore, **d*** is false.³²

Against this claim, the following argument can be presented. Consider:

(7) there are *prima facie* reasons to pursue the good, and the good of one individual is of no more importance than the good of any other

³¹ For a different way to weaken **2a**, see (Shafer-Landau 2012, 9, 18–20). For a similar weakening strategy, see (FitzPatrick 2014, 898, 900; Parfit 2011, vol. 2, § 119; Shafer-Landau 2012, 27).

³² A criticism of Street's strategy from a realist perspective is in (Shafer-Landau 2012, 11–2); cp. also (Cuneo and Shafer-Landau 2014; FitzPatrick 2014).

(unless there are special reasons for thinking that more good is likely to be realized in one case rather than in the other).³³

(7) does not appear in the second list framed by Street in the passage mentioned above – where judgments (1’)-(6’) appear. But it is clear enough that (7) is among our most “deeply and widely held” normative judgments. Of course, it may be remarked that (7) is controversial – some authors deny it, some others heavily qualify it.³⁴ However, each judgment in the list (1)-(6) is controversial on its own, and it has been denied and challenged.³⁵ What is more, neither the debunkers nor their opposers can assume substantive truths as uncontroversial by default. The reason for this is as follow. What the debunkers are challenging is the assumption that we have default and independent evidences that our substantive views of practical reasons are true, at least if truth is realistically interpreted. For what we know, our feeling that certain normative views are true could merely be the fruit of evolutionary pressure on us. The main message of the debunking argument is just this: whatever the normative truth could possibly be, if our beliefs are uniquely determined by evolution, we should be able to deny that evolution is driving us off track, or that we are believing what we believe not because of its truth, but simply because of evolutionary forces acting on us. To put the point otherwise, the debunking argument applies *both* to true *and* to false normative beliefs. When it applies to true beliefs, it asks how is it possible that true beliefs coincide with evolutionary-driven beliefs. When it applies to false beliefs, it asks how their falsity can be spotted, notwithstanding the evolutionary pressure pushing us to believe them true. How is it possible that evolution brought us to track the truth, when false beliefs would have been equally possible, and equally adaptive? A presupposition of the debunking argument is that, no matter which normative views are true, if normative views are evolution-driven a conciliation between their causes and their truth (and a way to spot their falsity, notwithstanding their evolution-driven attraction) is to be found.³⁶

33 For statements of this principle, see (Lazari-Radek and Singer 2014, 133–4; Sidgwick 1907, 380).

34 See (Scheffler 1994; Taurek 1977).

35 See (Greene 2013).

36 On the claim that the debunking argument, and the responses to it, should not assume the default truth of the beliefs considered, see (Bedke 2014, § 3; Enoch 2011, 176; Gibbard 2003, 263; Joyce 2016b; Mason 2010, 771; Shafer-Landau 2012, 2, 10–11, 21, 23, 32–35; Street 2006, 132–3, 2008, 214; Tersman 2016; Vavova 2015, 111, 2016, 12; White 2010, 588; Woods 2016, § 1). Some authors challenge this claim, and assume substantive truths as a ground for

One need to show, then, that (7) above is uncontroversial or even true. What matters here is not the fact that (1)-(6) appear true as, or as uncontroversial as, (7), whereas (1')-(6') seem false or controversial. It is exactly the evidential, or the truth-conduciveness, of these appearances that the debunking argument challenges.³⁷

The relevant fact is that, whatever its epistemic or factive status, (7) is still a widespread tenet in many historical and contemporary, philosophical and common sense moral theories – ranging from the golden rule to contemporary impartial consequentialism.³⁸ Notice also that (7) is not a merely formal normative principle, insufficient to warrant any specific, substantive normative belief. (7) can provide grounds to rebut certain specific normative beliefs – notably, judgments (1)-(6) above, among others.³⁹

Importantly, (7) may be counter-adaptive: in certain contexts, someone acting upon it should suffer extreme losses. In many cases, action influenced by (7) will be non-speciesist, fully impartial, aimed at the promotion of the greatest good, independently of any evolutionary outcome.⁴⁰ Of course, if the good is identified with the survival of the individuals or of the species, (7) can

their response to the evolutionary debunking argument; see (Enoch 2011, § 7.4.; Parfit 2011, vol. 2, § 119; Schafer 2010; Skarsaune 2011; Tersman 2016; Wielenberg 2010, 447, 450, 462).

³⁷ Cp. (Handfield 2016, § 4.5.2; Mason 2010, 774, 776). Indeed, in some contexts (2') can be true, or plausible enough – for instance, think about the duty of officials not to be biased towards family members and friends: (2') can express this duty of impartiality. I am grateful to a referee of this journal for having pressed me to clarify my ideas on these points.

³⁸ See (Terry 2011). Notice, though, that (7) does not amount to full-fledged utilitarianism, or to an extreme form of pure altruism – as it is signaled by the mention of '*prima facie* reasons' in its formulation. In order to make (7) overlapping with utilitarianism, one needs to claim that the reasons stated in it are *always overriding* or *decisive*. In its present formulation, (7) is compatible with pluralist views – for instance with views allowing first-personal or other agent-relative prerogatives; see, for instance, (Scheffler 1994). This does not diminish the validity of the general point made in the text, as (7) still is not evolution-driven. Or at least, this I shall claim in the main text. Thanks to M. Reichlin for having pushed me to clarify this point.

³⁹ Better, (7) provides a ground to rebut the claim that judgments (1)-(6) provide overriding, decisive or all-considered reasons to act. (Shafer-Landau 2012, 6) rightly points out that (Huemer 2008, 386) presents only wholly formal principles as epistemically pure, i.e. as able to escape evolutionary bias. This makes his rebutting of the debunking challenge unsuccessful. This is not the case with my version of this strategy, though – thanks to the fact that (7) is not merely formal, but it has a decidedly substantive content.

⁴⁰ In a similar vein, (Shafer-Landau 2012, 7) claims that principles that “counsel impartial benevolence, compassion for vulnerable strangers, kindness to small animals, concern for distant peoples and future generations, and speaking truth to power” are strikingly non-adaptive; cp. also (Enoch 2011, n. 31 to ch. 7). Of course, when (7) and similar principles are embedded in pluralist views where first-personal or agent-relative prerogatives are allowed, they can suggest impartiality and self-sacrifice only in certain cases – i.e. when the stakes are high enough.

imply many of the judgments appearing in the first list mentioned by Street. But any such coincidence needs to be argued for, and it seems rather implausible.⁴¹ Then, (7) is a relevant normative belief, whose self-evidence is grasped through careful reflection, which is agreed upon by many careful thinkers, and, more importantly, which is very likely not to be caused by evolutionary forces, or other similar non-truth tracking processes.⁴² It seems that there is at least one counter-example to **2a**, and a very relevant one. (7), namely a principle of impartial rational benevolence, cannot be debunked, and its truth or falsity are independent of evolutionary causes, nor can they be explained in evolutionary, or other non-truth-tracking, terms. If (7) is true, its truth is not affected by its evolution-driven attractiveness. If (7) is false, its falsity is not made more difficult to spot by its evolution-driven attractiveness. The very presence of (7), and its centrality in our normative thought, can be a ground to argue against **2a** and in favor of **2a***. Let's call the argument made till now the *counter-adaptive exception argument*.⁴³

The following objections can be raised against the counter-adaptive exception argument:

- I. HIDDEN ADAPTIVITY: (7) is not genuinely counter-adaptive. It is simply an enlargement of kin reciprocity and solidarity.
- II. ADAPTIVE BY-PRODUCT, or HISTORICAL ROOTS: (7) may be:
 - i. a judgment obtained by extending immediately adaptive judgments through rational reflection and generalization – the generalization of kin reciprocity can lead to (7);

41 Cp. (Lazari-Radek and Singer 2014, 196; Wilkins and Griffiths forthcoming). This hypothesis – that evolution is good and that this can dissolve the Darwinian dilemma by appealing to a sort of pre-established harmony between evolutionary-driven normative beliefs and normative truths – has been defended: see (Bedke 2014; Enoch 2011, 169–76; Parfit 2011, vol. 2, § 114; Schafer 2010; Skarsaune 2011, §§ 3, 5; Wielenberg 2010, 2016, § 5.4). I am unconvinced, but I have no space here to argue my lack of conviction. See also (Shafer-Landau 2012, 31–2).

42 It might be objected that being self-evident, or grasped by careful reflection, and being embedded in historical moralities, or agreed upon by careful thinkers are contradictory standards, or at most redundant. (This objection has been raised by a referee for this journal.) However, it might be contended that self-evidence, rational access and consent are congruent standards, meaning that each of them reinforce the other, and none is sufficient for *prima facie* plausibility. This is the doctrine stated in (Sidgwick 1907, 338–42).

43 Cp. (FitzPatrick 2014, 896–7; Parfit 2011, vol. 2, § 119) for a partially similar argument. See (Hooker 2016, 140) for a criticism of the counter-adaptive exception argument.

ii. a by-product of more basically adaptive cognitive faculties or capacities;⁴⁴

iii. a historically determined view – being, for instance, embedded in the Golden rule and in historical Christian ethics.⁴⁵

If one of i-iii. is true, then debunking may be in the offing again. An explanation is needed of why evolution, or cultural history, produced, even though as a by-product or a later refinement, a so wonderfully fine-tuned and apt capacity of moral cognition, or something so impartial such as (7).

III. EVOLUTIONARY IMPOSSIBILITY: (7) is genuinely counter-adaptive, i.e. it prevents adaptation and successful evolution. As a consequence, it will soon disappear, or it should have disappeared, as it is a mere transitory superfetation of evolution. Then, either (7) is not a genuine view, or it is doomed.

IV. EVOLUTIONARY SELF-DEFEATINGNESS: (7) is positively dangerous. If generalized, it will soon lead to the extinction of human race. Accordingly, (7) is *evolutionarily self-defeating*.

V. INSUFFICIENCY: even if (7) constitutes a genuine exception to 2a, its mere presence is not enough to reduce the scope of 2a, and to argue in favor of 2a*. Other counter-adaptive exceptions are needed, to build a cumulative case for weakening 2a.

VI. NEGATIVE RESULT: even assuming that (7) is not debunked, or debunkable, this does not amount to saying that it is rationally justified. That (7) is not biased by evolutionary forces simply means that it can aspire to be rationally assessed, not that it has been successful in turning out to be a true normative view. Accordingly, the mere mention of (7) is not enough to rescue normative realism, even though it may be sufficient to weaken 2a.⁴⁶

These objections can be rebutted. As to I, many scholars have shown that (7) cannot be seen as an extension of kin reciprocity or other evolution-driven normative views. Indeed, individuals acting upon (7) will be likely to be selected against, before they could become common enough to have any

44 See (Crisp 2006, 87–8; Enoch 2011, 167–8; Lazari-Radek and Singer 2014, 193; Nagel 2012, 74–5, 79; Parfit 2011, vol– 2, 492–510; Shafer-Landau 2012, 8; Singer 2011, 2006, 145–6; Wielenberg 2010, 443, 445–6, 2016, § 5.5). For some general views of various cognitive capacities as evolutionary by-products, see (Huemer 2005, 216; Maddy 1990, chap. 2; Nozick 1993). For a critical account of these strategies, see (Joyce 2016e).

45 See (Tersman 2008, 401–2).

46 Cp. (Kahane 2011, 119).

impact. There is no convincing evolutionary explanation of why people should help complete strangers, or even individual of other species, especially when this involves sacrifice – even a small sacrifice, even when stakes are very high. From a logical point of view, (7) can be regarded as independent, and not an extension of, principles such as egoism or partial altruism, i.e. of principles underlying (1)-(6) above.⁴⁷

As to **II**, two answers can be given to this objection. First, it might be argued that (7) is so strikingly counter-adaptive, that evolution itself should expectedly have provided obstacles to its diffusion. Accordingly, even assuming that our evolution-driven rationality could have led us to embrace (7), other evolution-driven judgments should conceivably exert a strong pressure against such an endorsement. It might be claimed that is highly unlikely that an evolutionary-driven basic capacity for reasoning could have led to endorse (7). Contrary to mathematical or scientific truth, pure altruism is a dangerous tenet for adaptation and survival. (This claim expresses the meaning of objection **III** above. Objection **III**, then, provides part of the answer to objection **II**.)

Second, the very idea that the by-products of evolution cannot be debunked can be criticized along the lines put forward by Sharon Street. She argues that the Darwinian dilemma can be addressed to the very capacity outgrown by evolution, which can give us access to (7) and similar judgments. This capacity itself is a product of evolution, even though some of the judgments grasped through it are not. Then, an explanation should be given of how is it possible that an evolution-biased capacity is able to track the truth. Evolutionary explanations cannot make reference to the truth. As a consequence, a robustly realist explanation of our capacity to grasp (7) cannot account for its evolutionary bases. However, positing a mere coincidence – claiming that this evolution-based capacity lands us on the truth – is too much of a fluke to be satisfactory. This is enough to reject the claim that (7) can be accounted as a by-product of evolution.

Objections **III** and **IV** can be fruitfully treated together. First of all, a distinction should be made between *counter-adaptive* and *non-adaptive* traits – the latter being capacities or traits not inimical to reproductive fitness, and therefore not liable to be extinguished by natural selection.⁴⁸ Assume that endorsement of (7) is simply non-adaptive. It might be argued that even in this case, its endorsement is in need of explanation, because non-adaptive traits

⁴⁷ See (Bowles 2006; Darwin 2004, chap. 5; Dawkins 2006, 2; Greene 2013, chap. 3; Lazari-Radek and Singer 2014, 186–7, 191–2; Okasha 2013; Sober and Wilson 1998, 5–6, 9); cp. also (Shafer-Landau 2012, 8).

⁴⁸ Cp. (Nagel 2012, 78, 112).

can easily disappear during the millennia of human history – and this is the core of objection **III**. The principle underlying this objection is the following: no relevant traits – no relevant normative or theoretical views – can emerge without an evolutionary explanation. This principle can have different versions – it may be narrower (focusing only on natural selection) or broader (allowing any explanatory connection with evolution). However, it is controversial enough, and many, even within evolutionary psychology scholarship, have criticized it.⁴⁹ Moreover, there are many relevant phenomena whose evolutionary account is still hotly debated, with people proposing different accounts and authors denying that an evolutionary explanation is possible at all – this is the case, for instance, of art or fiction.⁵⁰ Now, this is enough to allow that endorsement of (7) may still lack a plausible evolutionary explanation. This does not imply that such an explanation will not be found in the future. But, for now, endorsement of (7) is here, notwithstanding evolution. This is a sign that evolution did not explain away impartiality, and that no debunking of it can be given, at least for now – and this is an answer to objection **III**.⁵¹

Assume that endorsement of (7) is not only non-adaptive, but also counter-adaptive, i.e. it prevents successful reproduction. If so, as objection **IV** intimates, endorsement of (7) should not be possible, as it would have led to human extinction. To put it otherwise, (7) is *evolutionarily self-defeating*. Evolutionary self-defeatingness may be given the following definition:

EVOLUTIONARY SELF-DEFEATINGNESS: a normative judgment J is evolutionarily self-defeating when **i.** it prevents the reproductive success of its supporters, by causing the extinction of the individuals endorsing it, and **ii.** the extinction of such individuals will prevent the aims set by J from being achieved.

Objection **IV** suggests that **i.** individuals entertaining (7) will be selected against, because their endorsement of (7) will lead them to extreme sacrifices, sacrifices preventing their successful reproduction, and that **ii.**, if people endorsing it fail to reproduce themselves, no one else will endorse (7), and no

49 See, for instance, (Gould and Lewontin 1979; Pigliucci et al. 2000).

50 See, for instance, (Boyd 2009; Gottschall 2012).

51 On the possibility that endorsement of (7) can be defeasible, or revisable, due to a future debunking, cp. (Singer and De Lazari-Radek 2016, 199). (Shafer-Landau 2012, 8) sees defeasibility of principles such as (7) as putting realism “in a precarious position”. For this reason, he argues for a stronger rebutting strategy than the one I am using here.

one will act upon it. Accordingly, the aims set by (7) will no longer be achieved. As a consequence, (7) will fail in its own terms.⁵²

However, that cannot be true, because neither **i.** nor **ii.** are true of (7). Let's start with **ii.** As it should be clear from the responses given to the previous objections, endorsement of (7) is not driven by natural selection. Endorsement of (7) is not an inherited trait. Then, **ii.** is false. Even if all the supporters of (7) in a given generation go extinct, nothing prevents the chance that (7) will reappear later.

Moreover, it might be argued that (7) does not require sacrifices so hard to lead its supporters to extinction. Then, **i.** is false as well. The reasoning for this conclusion is as follows. (7) is an impartial principle, disallowing personal prerogatives – i.e. preferences for one's own good, or for the good of one's dearest and nearest.⁵³ Impartiality amounts to equal concern for the good of everyone, *including oneself*.⁵⁴ Accordingly, self-preferential actions are allowed only when the good produced by them is greater than the good brought about by altruistic acts.

Consider first a world where everyone endorses (7) – a *fully altruistic world*. In this world, any additional altruistic action produces less good than a self-preferential action, because everyone is already doing many altruistic actions, and the marginal contribution of an additional altruistic act is rapidly diminishing. Then, in this world, self-preferential actions will very often be permitted by (7).

Next, consider a world where only some people endorse (7) – a *partially altruistic world*. In this world, there will be many cases in which self-preferential actions produce less good than altruistic acts. In these cases, (7) will require its supporters to act altruistically. However, it might be argued that even in a partially altruistic world, (7) will not require extreme sacrifices, for the following reasons. If extreme sacrifices can lead to the disappearance of altruists, (7) will dictate avoiding these sacrifices, because the disappearance of altruists is an evil to be avoided, even in (7)'s lights. In particular, it might be argued that, beyond a given threshold of altruism, any additional sacrifice will produce less good than self-preferential actions, because of the dangerous

52 The notion of evolutionary self-defeatingness in the main text is reminiscent of, even though not coincident with, the central notions of self-defeatingness in the now standard treatment provided by (Parfit 1984, Part One, especially §§ 10, 11, 17). My response to objection **IV** is deeply indebted to Parfit's treatment. I am grateful to M. Reichlin for prompting me to clarify many points in my discussion here.

53 From now onwards, I shall call an action driven by preference for one's own good, and for the good of one's nearest and dearest, a *self-preferential action*.

54 On impartiality, see (Jollimore 2014).

prospect of the disappearance of altruists. In such extreme cases, (7) will dictate self-preferential actions. In very extreme cases, (7) can even require that most people discard their belief in (7), and instead adopt judgements similar to (1)-(6) – at least if this is compatible with a residual dose of altruism, and saves these impure altruists from disappearance. (7), then, could be *indirectly self-defeating* or *partially self-effacing*. However, this does not show that (7) is failing in its own terms – as in these sorts of cases the dispositions or the beliefs dictated by (7) will produce the best outcome, in terms of impartial good. Both in fully and in partially altruistic worlds, then, (7) will be evolutionarily stable, as it will not require sacrifices leading its supporters to extinction.⁵⁵

However, as it is suggested by objection V, this may not be enough. Even allowing that (7) is an exception to the general evolutionary origins of our normative views, an isolated exception does not change the general picture. Most of our normative views can be debunked. As a consequence, 2a is true in the majority of cases.

But (7) is not so isolated as it may appear. First of all, (7) can be expressed in a more general way. Consider:

(8) whatever *prima facie* reason one has to do a given action, one's own identity or the identity of anyone involved in the action never act as defeaters or intensifiers of the reason considered.

(7) is a narrower version of (8), and we can imagine many other versions of (8) – for each and every specific practical reason we can envisage. (8) seems to be as non-adaptive as (7), and for the same reasons – it does not promote kin reciprocity, or species survival. Indeed, it can dictate sacrifice in favor of strangers and individuals of different species. Then, many specific impartial principles can be mentioned that are recalcitrant to evolutionary debunking, each of them being a specific implementation of general impartiality. In its turn, impartiality is a widely held and relevant ideal of human culture in many ages.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Notice that the fact that (7) is evolutionarily stable does not amount to saying that it is *evolution-driven*. The persistence of a given trait can be stable across evolutionary times, because no evolutionary force will never be able to jeopardize it. But the persistence of a given trait can in another sense be completely unrelated to evolution: evolutionary forces are neither able to promote nor able to prevent it. My claim in the text is that (7) is unrelated to evolutionary forces in such a way.

⁵⁶ Cp. (Lazari-Radek and Singer 2014, 198). Indeed, other substantive principles can be mentioned whose impact and content are non-adaptive. These principles, though, are not easily derivable from a general principle of impartiality. (Sinnott-Armstrong 2006, 43), for instance, mentions the duty not to kill and to care senile elderly people who cannot survive without great

Then, there are many exceptions to **2a**. As objection **VI** suggests, this may be a merely negative result. The fact that ideals of impartiality cannot be evolutionarily debunked is not proof of their truths. We still need an independent argument for this conclusion, and there is no warrant that this argument will go through stance-independent truth-makers. However, once we have some views whose emergence cannot so easily be explained in evolutionary terms, we can dismiss the Darwinian dilemma: there is no need to explain how these views can be true and simultaneously being produced by a non-truth-tracking process, or how these views can be false even though we are irresistibly led to endorse them, due to evolutionary pressures. Truth or falsity of pure impartiality can be assessed independently of these worries. **2a** should be substituted with **2a***. The latter narrows down the *scope* of **2a**: it is not the case that *most of our normative views* are influenced by evolution; rather, while *some* normative views are so influenced, other – equally relevant – views are not driven by evolutionary forces.

3.2. *Counterfactuals. Vs. 7.*⁵⁷

Consider the following counterfactuals:⁵⁸

A. In a distant evolutionary possible world, people's normative views would have been different from the ones held in the actual world (*different* evolutionary forces yield *different* normative beliefs).

B. In a near evolutionary world, a world where evolutionary forces are identical to the ones obtaining in the actual world, people would have the same normative views held in the actual world (*identical* evolutionary forces yield *identical* normative beliefs).

C. In a distant normative possible world, a world where normative facts of the matter would have been different, which is not also a distant evolutionary possible world, people's normative views would be the same as those held in the actual world (*identical* evolutionary forces and *different* normative facts yield *identical* normative beliefs).

help and who cannot reciprocate adequately or have more children and the doctrine of the double effect (but see (Wielenberg 2016, § 5.5). (FitzPatrick 2014, 897) mentions the belief that we should make present sacrifices to help protect distant, future generations from the harmful effects of climate change.

⁵⁷ Some of my claims in this subsection are similar to the ones presented in (Wielenberg 2010, 454–6).

⁵⁸ See (Bedke 2014, § 3.2; Clarke-Doane 2012, 319–20, 2016; Field 2005; Lillehammer 2010, 365; Sinnott-Armstrong 2006, 44).

D. In a distant normative possible world, which is not also a distant evolutionary possible world, people's normative views would be different from the ones held in the actual world (*different* normative facts and *identical* evolutionary forces yield *different* normative beliefs).⁵⁹

C underlies claim 7 above. Specifically, 7 suggests that **C** obtains. The counterfactual described in **C** shows that evolutionary forces prevent our normative beliefs from tracking stance-independent truths. This makes normative realism false. To put it in terms of the counterfactuals listed above, if **C** holds, then **D** doesn't. (Had evolutionary forces tracked normative truths, **D** would have been holding.)

However, in its turn the counterfactual described in **C** rests on those contained in **A** and **B**. These counterfactuals suggest that our normative beliefs track evolutionary forces, rather than stance-independent truths.

But if the conclusions reached in § 3.1. above are valid, then the counterfactuals described in **A** and **B** are no longer true. Many impartial principles such as (7) or (8) above could be held in distant evolutionary possible worlds, since in our actual world they held independently of the impact of evolutionary forces on other principles. But if **A** and **B** are no longer true, **C** can be challenged as well. If there are views that can be held in distant evolutionary worlds, it may be argued that these principles are held because they are tracking the truth. Or at least, if these principles are held in a sufficiently large number of possible worlds, *as well as in our actual world*, then it might be suggested that they track the normative truth. This is sufficient to challenge the idea that evolutionary forces systematically distort our normative beliefs, which is what 7 implies. 7 suggests that in a distant normative possible world which is not also a distant evolutionary possible world – call it a *C-world* –, normative beliefs would necessarily align with evolutionary forces (i.e. they would be uniquely determined by them), but evolutionary forces would never align with normative truths (i.e. they would

⁵⁹ On the reason why **A** and **B** are unproblematic counterfactuals, see (Clarke-Doane 2012, 319–20). On why

A*. In a distant evolutionary possible world, people's normative views would have been *identical* to the ones held in the actual world (*different* evolutionary forces yield *identical* normative beliefs),

and

B*. In a near evolutionary possible world, a world where evolutionary forces are identical to the ones obtaining in the actual world, people would have *different* normative views from the ones held in the actual world (*identical* evolutionary forces yield *different* normative beliefs),

are not relevant to the present discussion, see again (Clarke-Doane 2012, 320).

never uniquely track truth). As a consequence, in a C-world, normative beliefs would be systematically off-track. While it might be true that evolutionary forces would not align with normative truth – or at least nothing has here been said to deny this –, the result of § 3.1. above has been to deny that normative beliefs would necessarily align with evolutionary forces. Necessary alignment would occur if **2a** is true. But if **2a*** is true, then there is no *necessary* alignment. Some normative beliefs may align with evolutionary forces, but many others may not. Accordingly, we couldn't know which beliefs people would have in a C-world. Or at least, we couldn't draw any conclusion on this issue from mere consideration of the direction and the nature of evolutionary forces.

Another argument can be given here concerning C-worlds. Most scholars concur in accepting the idea that any viable metaethical view should account for the supervenience of the normative on the non-normative, or on the natural, on pain of making moral assessments arbitrary. As R. Shafer-Landau puts it, “we cannot conceive of a plausible moral order that licences different moral ascriptions for situations that are in all other respects identical.” (Shafer-Landau 2003, 78)⁶⁰

Consider again a C-world. It can be interpreted in two different ways. If evolution *fixes* the overall descriptive properties of a C-world, then it is also *descriptively identical* to our world. But a world that is descriptively identical to our world cannot be normatively different from the latter. A C-world, then, goes against supervenience. It may be both conceptually and metaphysically impossible. To put it otherwise, the fact is that if evolutionary forces, and the

⁶⁰ Shafer-Landau deals with moral realism. However, his claims can be easily transferred to normative realism; see (Blackburn 1993, chap. 6; Hare 1952, 80–1, *passim*, 1989; Sturgeon 1985); *cp.* also (Kramer 2009, chap. 10). Indeed, some authors contended that a problem for normative non-naturalist realism is how to frame an account of the supervenience relation – how to give a viable explanation of the fact that non-normative properties covary with normative ones, without assuming identity of normative and non-normative properties; see (Blackburn 1993, chaps. 6–7, 1984, 182–7). Shafer-Landau gave an answer to this dilemma, by positing an asymmetrical relation of constitution between normative and non-normative properties. His idea is that a true normative predication does not entail any particular descriptive one – this allows him to reject identity –, but the non-normative characteristics fix a thing's normative features: see (Shafer-Landau 2003, 85) Despite normative properties not being identical to physical ones, the former are *realized* by instantiations of physical properties. Thus, no normative facts can obtain without the physical stuff that *constitutes* them. Natural facts, then, *exhaustively compose*, or *constitute*, normative facts; see (Shafer-Landau 2003, 73–6). As a consequence, a thing's normative status cannot change without some correlative change in its non-normative features: the non-normative features of a situation fix its normative status – a normative fact supervenes on a particular concatenation of descriptive facts just because these facts realize the normative property in question; see (Shafer-Landau 2003, 77).

rest of descriptive properties, in a C-world are identical to the descriptive characteristics of our actual world, normative truths in a C-world cannot differ from normative truths in our world. Descriptive features fix normative properties. Then, the counterfactual envisaged in 7 is impossible.⁶¹

Alternatively, a C-world may be evolutionarily identical, but descriptively different. If so, normative facts of the matter would be different. But then there is no guarantee that normative beliefs will be systematically off-track – at least since 2a is not true. We need further arguments to claim that in a C-world where evolutionary facts do not exhaust the descriptive base, most normative beliefs will be off-track.⁶²

7, then, is doubly wrong. Either it is false in suggesting that in a C-world normative beliefs would necessarily align with evolutionary forces – this is a result of the fact that 2a is false, while 2a* is true –, or it is conceptually flawed,

61 Here, I make several assumptions, which I have no space to defend. For instance, I assume global and inter-worlds supervenience, and I am assuming that supervenience holds both as a metaphysical and a conceptual requirement; cp. (Shafer-Landau 2003, 85–9). Many scholars argue that a C-world may be metaphysically impossible, but still *conceptually* possible, i.e. that it is at least intelligible, as we can conceive of a world where normative truths are different from the ones holding in the actual world, but anything else – including normative beliefs – is identical to anything existing in the actual world; see (Clarke-Doane 2012, 320–1, 323–6, 334; Shafer-Landau 2012, 16; Street 2008, 208). According to these scholars, that a C-world is conceptually possible, or intelligible, is enough to trigger the Darwinian dilemma. I am unconvinced. My main reason is the following. If supervenience rests on a constitution claim, as it does in Shafer-Landau’s approach summarized in n. 63 above, then epistemic access to, and conceptual intelligibility of, normative properties require a grasp of the subvenient descriptive features. To put it otherwise, it is impossible to grasp normative concepts without grasping their application – i.e. without grasping the things having the normative properties that these concepts refer to. As a consequence, we can conceive of multiple realizability – i.e. we can conceptually envisage that the same normative property can be joined to different clusters of non-normative properties. But we cannot conceive the denial of the following conditional: if a given normative property **Np** applies to a given cluster of descriptive properties **Dp**, then, *in the same world, or in identical worlds*, any instance of **Dp** will instantiate **Np** as well. However, further arguments are needed to support this claim, and I have no space here to provide them. Notice, also, that there are two different issues here. One thing is to say that a C-world it is not metaphysically and conceptually possible. Another thing is to say that a radically alternative world, a very distant possible world, – different both in its normative and in its descriptive properties – is not metaphysically and conceptually possible. A third possibility is a world with *different* descriptive properties and the *same* normative properties. The latter two possibilities are both possible – consider **A*** and **B*** in n. 60 above. (Clarke-Doane 2012, 325) seems conflating these different distinctions. My remarks here are similar to the ones in (Shafer-Landau 2007, 326, 2012, 16)

62 For arguments that are similar to the one given in the text, see (Clarke-Doane 2016, 26–7, 30).

because it violates supervenience, and postulates a metaphysically and conceptually impossible world.⁶³

4. CONCLUSIONS.

At least in the reconstruction given in § 2 above, the debunking argument crucially relies on two premises – **2a** and **7**. The arguments given in § 3 above show that **7** is either false or conceptually flawed, and a much weaker claim, **2a***, is to be substituted to **2a**. As a consequence, the upshot of the debunking argument is much more limited than the debunkers would like to suggest. What the debunking argument can show is that *some of our* normative views are biased by evolution. But there are other views that can resist this bias, and whose epistemic status is not problematic. It seems, then, that realists have nothing to fear from the debunking argument – or at least nothing new. All the doubts that the debunkers raise coincide with standard skeptical objections to normative realism.⁶⁴ The debunking argument has been presented as an empirical claim, to the effect that many of our normative beliefs are unjustified, or insufficiently justified. It turns out that it is either a much more limited claim – some of our normative views can be unjustified or insufficiently justified – or a trivial conceptual claim – all our normative views may be false.

Consider:

Optometrist. Your optometrist says that your color vision might be deceiving you: the tests suggest you are blue-green colorblind.

Skeptic. The skeptic says that all your senses might be deceiving you. She has done no tests.

(Vavova 2015, 105–6) claims that the debunking argument is to be likened to *Optometrist*, and that this makes it more formidable and threatening than

⁶³ Notice that claiming that normative truths are fixed by non-normative truths, and that the supervenience of normative on non-normative holds, does not amount to claiming that certain normative truths hold *in every possible world*, but to the rather weaker claim that normative truths are stable across identical, or relevantly similar, worlds; cp. (Clarke-Doane 2016, 26–7; Joyce 2016b; Shafer-Landau 2012, 15–6; Tersman 2016, § 3.3; Wielenberg 2016, § 5.5). For arguments similar to the one given in the text, see (Handfield 2016, § 4.3; Wielenberg 2016, § 5.3).

⁶⁴ Cp. (Vavova 2014). On the connection between the debunking arguments and other kinds of objections to normative realism, in particular Harman’s challenge in (Harman 1977, 7–9), see (Clarke-Doane 2016; Enoch 2011, chap. 7; FitzPatrick 2014, 891; Joyce 2005, 184–90; Mogensen 2015b, § 3; Shafer-Landau 2007, 2012, 1–2; Wielenberg 2010, 452, 461; Woods 2016).

the skeptical challenge. The debunkers advance an empirical claim, which challenges the reliability of most of our normative beliefs.⁶⁵

Consider this case:

Illusion. Exposed to the Muller-Lyon illusion's picture, you systematically produce wrong assessment of length. The physiological features of your eye explain these assessments. In the rest of non-delusive cases, you have a good intuitive grasp of length.⁶⁶

It is my contention here that, with **2a*** in place of **2a**, and without **7**, the debunking argument is to be likened to *Illusion*. This is not a great threat to a realist interpretation of vision. The same holds for normative beliefs. The debunking argument is not a real threat to normative realism – or at least it is no greater threat than standard skeptical arguments or local instances of mistaken beliefs.⁶⁷

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⁶⁵ Cp. also (Bedke 2014, § 3.1).

⁶⁶ For a different use of the same example, see (Mason 2010, 776).

⁶⁷ I am grateful to M. Reichlin and a referee for this journal for very useful comments on a previous version of this article. Michele Bocchiola read a previous version of this paper, giving precious suggestions on the form and the content of it. xI am grateful to him. Usual *caveats* hold.

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REALISM AND NATURALISATION IN A PRACTICAL REASON ACCOUNT

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ABSTRACT

The paper contends that moral realism entails the mind-independent truth of some moral judgements; but that the mind-independence of "moral facts" is only partly analogous to the mind-independence of physical facts. It is also argued that characteristic moral facts are those relative to the character and dispositions of persons, which supervene on psychological facts. Along with these evaluative facts there are also deontic facts, concerning the reasons for or against embarking on some course of action; these are based on natural facts concerning human beings and the effects of certain actions on their well-being and dispositions. These facts about human beings are not immediately moral facts, but necessarily assume a moral significance for any rational individual reflecting on them. So, there are objective reasons for action, as contended by moral realism, even though actual obligation presupposes the reflective endorsement of these objective reasons into our subjective system of intentions. Finally, some standard objections are discussed to this moderate realistic account

KEYWORDS

Moral realism, constructivism, objective reasons, evolutionary debunking.

The most common version of moral realism is the naturalistic one, which conceives of moral facts or properties as natural ones, thus warranting their scientific respectability¹. A canonical objection to this realistic account is that it adopts a sort of theoretical attitude, that is, it conceives of morality as a form of knowledge: what we are doing in morals is knowing the "moral part" of the

¹ Paradigmatic statements are in R. N. Boyd, *How to Be a Moral Realist*, in G. Sayre-McCord (ed.), *Essays on Moral Realism*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1988, pp. 181-228; N. Sturgeon, *Moral Explanations*, in G. Sayre-McCord (ed.), *Essays on Moral Realism*, pp. 229-255; D. O. Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1989.

world. According to the objection, this poses decisive difficulties concerning the intrinsically motivating feature of moral propositions. Those who accept a moral framework based on the genuinely practical capacities of reason, on the contrary, tend to accept some version of constructivism, according to which moral facts or properties are produced or constructed through practical reasoning².

Defenders of naturalisation, who pursue a conception of morality based on empirical research in evolutionary biology, developmental psychology, and neuroscience, generally presuppose a non-cognitivist meta-ethics, in some recent and more refined version than classical emotivism, such as projectivism or fictionalism³.

In these pages, I wish to explore the possibility of a theory based on practical reason that takes into account naturalisation but defends a non-naturalistic, moderate and reasonable version of moral realism concerning moral facts, while accepting a constructivist account of moral obligation. Sections 1 to 4 present the basic traits of this account; sections 5 to 7 discuss four objections that can be raised against it.

1.

Moral realism is the view that there are moral facts, which are not constituted by our desires, preferences, approvals or disapprovals, but are independent of any such attitude on our part. In Shafer Landau's words, it is the view according to which moral judgments, "when true, are so independently of what any human being, anywhere, in any circumstance whatever, thinks of them"⁴. Similarly, Enoch defines it as the view that there are irreducibly normative truths and facts, which "are independent of us, our desires and our (or anyone's) will. And our thinking and talking about them amounts not just to an

² See C. Korsgaard, *Realism and Constructivism in Twentieth-Century Moral Philosophy*, in *Philosophy in America at the Turn of the Century*, The Philosophy Documentation Center, Charlottesville 2003, pp. 99-122; C. Bagnoli, *Il ruolo epistemico delle norme costitutive*, in Ead. (ed.), *Che fare? Nuove prospettive filosofiche sull'azione*, Carocci, Roma 2013, pp. 129-152.

³ On non-cognitivist sentimentalism, see S. Nichols, *Sentimental Rules. On the Natural Foundations of Moral Judgment*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2004; on fictionalism, R. Joyce, *The Myth of Morality*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001. Projectivism is famously defended by J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, Penguin Harmondsworth 1977.

⁴ R. Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism. A Defence*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2003, p. 2; cf. Id. *Evolutionary Debunking, Moral Realism and Moral Knowledge*, «Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy», 7, 2012, n. 1, p. 1.

expression of any practical attitude, but to a representation of these normative truths and facts”⁵.

Moral realism is originally a reactive conception, that is, it was born as a reaction to voluntarist views, such as those of Hobbes, Pufendorf and Locke, which conceived of moral properties as the purely artificial (and perhaps arbitrary) product of a will – God’s or a human sovereign’s. As all reactions, it is largely a polemic overstatement that leads to talk of moral rightness and wrongness as if they were real properties in the world, fully similar to the heaviness of physical objects. Such polemical root is evident, for example, in the work of early realists such as Samuel Clarke and Richard Price⁶.

Talk of “realism” in ethics must, however, be understood in an analogical sense. In a way analogous, but not identical, to what happens for physical facts in the world, whose nature does not depend on what we happen to think of them, also for (at least some) moral issues, things are as they are, even though some individuals or communities believe differently. It is the notion of mind-independence that characterises moral realism differentially from other forms of moral objectivism. In fact, one can be an objectivist in ethics by simply believing that there are moral truths, that is, moral conclusions upon which we can reach some agreement, or that necessarily follow from some presuppositions, such as a constructive procedure. This, however, would in no way imply the existence of moral facts, independent of our normative attitudes. Moral realism defends a stronger form of objectivism, that is, the claim that the truth or falsity of some moral propositions is independent from anything that some humans – and perhaps even all humans – happen to think on the matter.

However, what does this mind-independence of moral truths exactly mean? In the account I am willing to defend, it does not mean that moral truths would exist, in heaven or earth, even if there were no human or divine mind to think of them. It does not even mean that the truth of moral propositions depends on some moral ontology that precedes any normative human reflection. Instead, it means that whoever reasons correctly from the available evidence, and is not distracted by self-concern or irrelevant factors, does reach certain conclusions on some issues. Therefore, mind-independence means independence from any particular mental act of approval or disapproval, by single individuals or historically and culturally determined human groups. In other

⁵ D. Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defense of Robust Realism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2011, p. 1.

⁶ S. Clarke, *A Discourse concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation* (1705), in D. D. Raphael (ed.), *British Moralists 1650-1800*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis 1991, vol. I; R. Price, *A Review of the Principal questions of Morals* (1758), Clarendon Press, Oxford 1974.

words, being moral realists does not imply holding that cruelty and paedophilia would be wrong even if there were no human beings on earth. And this marks a difference between scientific and moral realism, for, if the former is correct, then the earth would be turning around the sun even if everybody considered it still, and even if no human or non-human mind ever existed. On the contrary, if no human being existed, so far as we can tell, no moral facts would exist as well⁷; but moral facts do exist, since humans exist and are endowed with practical reason.

2.

The general account of moral realism that I want to propose is this: it is a *fact* that an individual's desiring another one's suffering, or having racist or paedophilic attitudes, embodies the moral property of depravity, and it is this fact which makes the moral proposition, according to which that individual is depraved, true. It is not, in other words, the attitude that would be taken by an individual in epistemically favourable conditions, or who followed certain procedural rules, that makes the proposition true. On the contrary, the truth of that proposition *requires* an individual who takes an appropriate viewpoint – and thus, has all the available evidence and is not in any way hindered from grasping the morally relevant elements of the situation – to adopt such a judgment. Of course, this adoption is in no way irrelevant: it is only through moral judgment, *i.e.*, through the adoption of morally relevant considerations by the agent, that such considerations are supplied with the authority of reason, and can give rise to moral motivation. And it is only the agent's acknowledgement of such reasons through moral judgment that generates an obligation to perform any action.

This account differs from constructivism, that is, from the view according to which moral facts are constructions from the available evidence. For constructivists, in fact, there are no moral facts prior to the procedures that, as free and rational agents, we adopt to reach intersubjectively-agreed decisions. On this account, “*certain facts count as moral facts because some principles, resulting from an adequately defined construction procedure, make them such*”, so that “*what constitutes a moral fact is the result of some function of our way of reasoning*”⁸. In other words, the constructivist approach has it that we read the

⁷ Shafer-Landau also agrees on this point (*Moral Realism*, p. 15).

⁸ M. Bocchiola, *Il costruttivismo morale e il problema dell'oggettività*, in C. Bagnoli (ed.), *Che fare?*, pp. 153-169, at 153 and 156. There are, of course, many versions of constructivism (as well as of realism); see the useful discussion in C. Bagnoli, *Constructivism in Metaethics*,

non-moral facts in a certain way, in the light of a construction procedure – *e.g.*, that only principles that everyone could prefer or adopt are in fact acceptable – and, in this way, we load them with a moral value that they otherwise would not have. On the contrary, the realist approach suggests that certain facts are morally relevant independently of any attitude on our part. It is not the fact that we consider them, or that we consider them under some specific perspective, which makes them relevant; it is their being relevant that makes them worthy of being considered. What facts are we talking about? I propose to distinguish two morally relevant kinds of facts, corresponding to two fundamental kinds of moral propositions: facts relative to evaluative properties and facts relative to deontic properties.

Evaluative properties are those relative to the character and dispositions of people. To say, for example, that John is a racist, or a paedophile, is to say that he shows certain character traits and psychological dispositions that realise the property of wickedness or cruelty. We can say that this moral property supervenes on certain natural properties, that is, that to hate people with the skin of a specific colour (or of any colour different from ours) is a psychological disposition that *per se* realises the moral property of wickedness; and the same holds for the disposition to harm these people, or rejoice in seeing them suffer. Supervenience implies that such psychological disposition cannot fail without the moral properties failing correspondingly⁹. Of course, the existence of such properties is not mind-independent *simpliciter*, for they would not exist were they not realised in the racist's mind: however, it is independent of the mind of any observer, who can identify them in the racist's character and actions. So, when Peter sees John doing certain acts, and declares that "John is cruel and depraved", this proposition is made true by its appropriately tracking a real feature of John's psychology. Evaluative propositions in third person, and particularly those using "thick" concepts, provide the clearest example of descriptive moral propositions: these are sufficiently analogous to scientific propositions¹⁰. To attribute to an individual a moral characteristic of this kind is to state a fact about him: this description is objective, but necessarily uses evalua-

«Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy» (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/constructivism-metaethics/#ConCon>).

⁹ As noted by Shafer-Landau, this moral ontology is quite respectable from a scientific point of view and does not differ from property-dualistic accounts that have been proposed in the philosophy of mind. Moreover, the difference between non-naturalistic and non-reductive naturalistic accounts is almost trifling (*Moral Realism*, pp. 65-78).

¹⁰ Analogous does not mean identical: for example, whether the properties mentioned in these propositions have original (*i.e.* not inherited) causal powers is a matter of discussion. See Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*, pp. 98-114.

tive terms. One can deny that this is a moral fact only by accepting a very narrow conception of “fact”, one conceiving facts only as sensory impressions¹¹; but even scientific facts cannot be considered as mere perceptions, since they involve the application of concepts. However, sentences containing evaluative moral properties are not purely descriptive propositions: rather, they inseparably intertwine description and evaluation, since the moral facts that they report require the adoption of the normative perspective to be properly characterised. These propositions apply to agents and their characters, as revealed by their actions, attitudes and dispositions; they are the kind of moral propositions that are taken as basic by virtue ethicists, and are for the most part uttered in a third-person perspective.

3.

The second kind of moral facts, and of moral propositions, are those relative to normative or deontic properties. These facts are those deserving consideration when we take the first-person perspective, that is, when we have to decide what is the right thing to do: in the previous example, when we take John’s, not Peter’s viewpoint. They are facts providing us with reasons to perform or not to perform certain acts, or to adopt or not to adopt certain principles. Particularly relevant, in this perspective, are those natural facts about human beings that explain and constitute their being moral agents, or beings endowed with moral status. These natural characteristics of human beings account for their rich and profound experience of life and in themselves provide normative reasons for acting. Irreducibly normative truths are those establishing that some natural fact about human beings counts in favour of doing or refraining from some kind of action¹². Central, among these facts are those that, according to evolutionary, psychological and neuro-scientific accounts, are at the basis of the evolution and development of morality. These include the fact that we are social beings; that we are sentient beings with a capacity for physical and psychological suffering; that we possess a syntactically complex language that makes our sufferings communicable; that we have superior cognitive powers that make our sufferings deeper than those of other animals, on account of our capacity to extend ourselves in time, both in the past and in the future; that we are able to reflect on our past and future actions, and therefore

¹¹ For a critique of this conception, see H. Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2002.

¹² T. Scanlon, *Being Realistic About Reasons*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014, pp. 30-33.

to make projects and have short- and long-term intentions to act. All these, and many other, facts do not depend on us, on our choices, commitments and ways of thinking: our being reflective and normative animals, and therefore our having moral agency does not depend on our attitudes, desires or preferences, but is a central element that guarantees the individual and collective survival of the members of our species, as well as a central element in all ideals of human flourishing that different cultures have generated in different times.

The listed characteristics contribute to make human beings members of the moral community. They are real properties, inherent in human beings and endowing them with moral status. To take these facts in consideration is not, therefore, optional, or dependent on our attitudes, desires or preferences; whoever shares these capacities, and therefore can ask him/herself what it is right to do on a certain occasion, ought to take these elements into consideration, that is, to treat these characteristics as reasons for acting. Of course, it is also possible to take them into consideration in a negative sense, that is, to consider them only in order to violate them: accordingly, a sadist will consider the capacity to suffer, and the depth of human suffering, as a reason to cause pain. However, the more we find out on the fundamental mechanisms of our moral capacity, the more we realise that some central facts explaining it give rise to reasons for action that are not optional, but ought to be taken into account by anyone asking herself what to do. We can thus say that reasons for action are inscribed in the situation, that is, that any rational agent endowed with normative powers cannot but acknowledge that certain considerations by themselves guide behaviour and require some kind of action.

Biology provides us with ever more detailed evidence on these facts. Since Darwin's work, evolutionary theory has underlined that the moral capacity emerges from human natural sociality (something which is not univocally proper to human beings), coupled with certain high-order cognitive capacities, such as memory and language, and a special reflexive capacity that allows for the internalisation of others' voice: these are the roots of conscience, that is, of the sense of a debt to the social group in which we are members, and particularly to those with whom we maintain close relationships¹³. Moreover, recent research attributes a central role, in the emergence of the moral faculty, to empathy, that is, to the capacity to make others' passion resonate in us: this is, firstly, a sort of emotive contagion – a capacity that is shared by many non-human animals – but then also a more reflexive capacity to imagine the oth-

¹³ The basic scientific hypotheses concerning the moral faculty are discussed in R. Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*, The MIT Press, Cambridge 2006 e P. Kitcher, *The Ethical Project*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2011.

ers' condition, maintaining the distinction between oneself and the other, and therefore feeling the other's pain as the other's, in a spirit of authentic compassion¹⁴. Empathy is a central element that helps fixing the distinction between oneself and the other, and to give rise to a sense of indebtedness towards others, and of a moral agency that is required on our part.

These natural facts, to which today's naturalised accounts connect moral experience, are not, as such, moral facts. For example, being empathic is not, by itself, a moral fact, and not all kinds of altruistic behaviour constitute moral facts. However, these natural facts predispose human beings to moral behaviour: they constitute enabling – perhaps phylogenetically necessary – conditions for the emergence of moral behaviour. Beyond the pro-social acts that we share with other animals, the reflexive structure of human consciousness drives towards such questions as 'What should I do?', 'What is the best course of action to undertake in my present situation?'. This is equivalent to asking: what reasons do I have to act? The normative properties, such as right, wrong or duty, clearly are not "out there" in the world, but emerge from reflectively considering the circumstances and the morally relevant properties observable in them, that is, from taking into account the objective reasons for action. Adopting a realistic account of deontic properties thus means that the reasons I have for doing x or y in circumstances c , are objectively detectable in the situation: there is some (usually natural) fact p or q that counts in favour of doing x or y , for an agent A , in circumstances c ¹⁵. It means that the characteristics that are morally relevant, in situations where individuals bearing moral status are involved, do not depend on the perspective or the procedure that we decide to adopt, but are part of a complete appropriate description of the situation. Such characteristics constrain the decisions we can take, by providing us with reasons independent of our desires and attitudes.

Although part of the reasons we have depends on facts that are independent of any attitude of ours – facts that are part of the human condition, as it was shaped by evolutionary history – the actual normativity of these facts, that is, the fact that they give rise to moral obligations, is constituted by our reflectively adopting principles that embody them. It is the reflective endorsement of some principle, in the light of an adequate weighing of all the reasons objectively present, as an appropriate principle for ruling our mutual expectations, which confers rational authority upon it: its being right or wrong, dutiful or prohibited, is not, therefore, a natural property of some action x , but a property naturally constructed from the objective reasons that we have, when we

¹⁴ See, for example, E. Lecaldano, *Simpatia*, Cortina, Milan 2013, pp. 96-126.

¹⁵ T. Scanlon, *Being Realistic About Reasons*, p. 31.

adopt the perspective of practical reason. The authority of practical reason is not disconnected from the emotions and sentiments that point out reasons for acting and refraining from action—for example, those emotions through which we empathically feel others' sufferings: practical reason builds on these emotive inputs, acknowledging them and either endorsing or rejecting them as possible principles of behaviour.

4.

The account just sketched for deontic properties can also be conceived of as intermediate between realism and constructivism, and cannot be properly identified with either. It is not realistic, if a realistic account implies that the rightness or wrongness of actions is a property somehow existent in them before any reflection. What I suggested is that there are objective reasons for action that ought to be considered by anyone who takes the normative perspective: these reasons basically stem from natural characteristics, which are independent on our attitudes and desires and which qualify the involved subjects as individuals endowed with moral status. Mind-independence, therefore, does not mean that moral properties would exist even if no human being existed, but that moral properties necessarily exist whenever human beings (and possibly also some non-human animals endowed with moral status) exist and are what they are: whoever has the capacity to adopt the normative perspective must take them into account and therefore cannot but accept certain normative conclusions. This account clearly differs from constructivism in rejecting the view according to which there are no moral facts, properties or reasons before the procedure that constructs them as such; for example, the procedure of maxim universalisation, or of adopting a conception of persons as free and equal citizens in a fair democratic polity. However, we might say that it accepts one element of the constructivist account, namely, the link between obligation and reflective endorsement: in short, reasons for action exist independently of our adopting them, but it is only through our acknowledging them and reflectively endorsing them that they become obligatory for us.

Moreover, it is clear that many moral facts are also the object of a social construction, because morality is for a large part a cultural institution, and, as such, is tied to historical facts and causes. This, of course, accounts for the partial truth of relativism. However, also in the context of socially constructed moral facts, natural facts relative to human beings do guide the construction and necessarily assume some moral relevance for anyone who adopts the normative perspective. Let us take a classic example, *i.e.* the institution of promis-

ing. Hume thought that promises are an artificial construction and that the disposition to keep them is an artificial virtue, whereas Clarke and Price maintained that the rightness of keeping promises is a real property just as much as any other natural property. According to the account I have sketched, both parties were partly right. On the one hand, promising is clearly a socially constructed human institution, one that simply did not exist before the evolution of human society; on the other hand, it is clear – as remarked by Hume himself – that it is quite natural, for human beings, to invent the institution of promising. In fact, there are natural human conditions – such as individual vulnerability, the necessity and utility of cooperation, the need of sociality and of strengthening group ties – that make it rational for them to do so. Of course, we can imagine a human society in which there are no promises, nor any similar, perhaps a bit rougher, social institution: however, it is difficult to do so, and there is no doubt that the lack of the opportunities offered by promising would make it much more difficult to fulfil many basic human needs. This is a clear example of the adaptive value of morality, and of how morality is, on one side, a cultural construction, which is affected by many historical factors that are not reducible to evolutionary pressures, and, on the other side, is constructed from natural elements, that is, from fundamental aspects of the human condition and of the conditions of human flourishing. The obligation to keep promises, therefore, is a socially constructed moral fact: however, it springs from an institution that is naturally created by human being in any society, starting from fundamental elements of the human condition. These elements are not chosen in the light of our desires or cultural attitudes, but are necessarily a part of any moral system, since they are central for human flourishing.

One last clarification may be offered, as far as the difference between the account here defended and so called internal realism is concerned. In a sense, what has been said so far is compatible with the views of people such as McDowell, Putnam and others, according to which moral properties are accessible only from a peculiar perspective, that is, from the normative perspective. The difference lies in the relevance here attributed to the naturalisation, that is, to the fact that the normative perspective is elicited and constrained by the evolutionary conditions that brought us to have the moral concepts that we in fact have. This means that it is not the specific kind of socialisation within some cultural context – that is, the sharing of a certain form of life and of some specific sensibility – that provides us with the perspective from which

moral facts can be grasped¹⁶. Rather, it is the simple fact of being rational individuals that evolution has endowed with normative powers that make them sensible to certain considerations for or against certain kinds of action. In any case, I believe that the difference between internal realism and slightly more robust kinds of moral realism is largely a verbal matter.

5.

The view sketched in the previous paragraphs defends moral realism taking into account recent empirical research on the moral faculty. As other forms of moral realism, it is subject to various standard objections: in the present paragraph I will deal briefly with two traditional objections, in the next two paragraphs (§ 6 and 7) I will discuss a bit more extensively two more recent ones.

The first objection is the one that accuses realist views such as the one here defended of the mistake of conferring moral value to the biological facts of human evolution. This objection can be fairly dismissed by noting that it fails to distinguish the direct identification of natural facts with moral facts and the view that natural facts count as reasons for certain moral judgements and actions; according to the latter view, moral facts spring from considering the natural facts in the light of the normative perspective. No naturalistic fallacy is here implied, nor any unexplained passage from is to ought: it is because we look for human flourishing that we have to take into account certain constraints, which are tied to the natural conditions that are accounted for by evolutionary biology. But to take them into account is to consider them from the deliberative perspective of practical reason. Differently from constructivist accounts, at the basis of normatively relevant reasons there are no abstract constructive procedures, but the survey of the natural conditions of our being normative animals: and these conditions do not depend on our desires and preferences.

According to another traditional objection, sociobiological explanations show that everything can be reduced to our selfish genes, through mechanisms such as kin selection, reciprocal altruism, and the like. Therefore, to ground moral principles on the evolutionary characteristics leading to the moral facul-

¹⁶ This is the view defended by J. McDowell, *Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following*, in S. Holtzman, C. Leich (eds.), *Wittgenstein: To Follow a Rule*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1981, pp. 141-162; Id., *Values and Secondary Qualities*, in *Mind, Value and Reality*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1998, pp. 131-150.

ty is to accept that altruism is but a pretence¹⁷. This interpretation is by no means inevitable. Many commentators now maintain that psychological altruism does exist, and that it has excellent evolutionary reasons: in fact, the best way for evolution to create a mechanism allowing for the individuals' survival and the reproduction of the group is not to give rise to the mere appearance of altruism, disguising creepy selfishness, but to allow for cultural evolution to progressively generate real psychological altruism. The fact that the first spring of moral sense can be located in our "selfish" genes is irrelevant, as long as it is accepted that the final "product" of evolution is an animal who displays not only a deeply-rooted self-concern, but also authentic altruism. To say that morality has its roots in selfish genes is thus not equivalent to saying that any form of altruism is but the hypocritical masking of egoism and the will to power; the most plausible hypothesis is rather that creating a genuine moral capacity was the optimistic choice, from an evolutionary viewpoint, in order to grant human adaptation and flourishing.

6.

One more recent objection is the one that takes the psychological and neuroscientific evidence on the role of emotions in moral judgment as an argument in favour of expressivist or subjectivist views of ethics. One relevant proposal is the so called "emotionist" hypothesis, according to which moral beliefs depend decisively on emotions, and moral facts are constituted by emotions¹⁸. This hypothesis accepts a response-dependent kind of realism, that is, it does not deny the existence of moral properties, but identifies them with our emotive reactions and therefore does not allow for any kind of moral objectivity. Actually, it explicitly endorses a subjectivist view, that makes moral properties dependent on the emotions that we happen to have; these, in turn, are strongly influenced by historical and cultural factors.

On this, we can observe that acknowledging the role of emotive reactions in accessing and evaluating the reasons that count in favour of some judgement or action is not equivalent to accepting that morality can be reduced to our emotions. Empathic concern, moral emotions and sentiments are certainly at

¹⁷ On sociobiology, see M. Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously: A Naturalistic Approach to Philosophy*, Blackwell, Oxford 1986; Id., *Evolution and Ethics: the Sociobiological Approach*, in L.P. Pojman (ed.), *Ethical Theory: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, Wadsworth, Belmont 1994.

¹⁸ See J.J. Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morality*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007, pp. 13-24.

the origin of our moral faculty, by contributing to the creation of a conception of the self as embedded in a web of relationships with others, and as a possible recipient of a moral appeal. Emotions and empathic concern are also at the heart of the formation of conscience, as the capacity to account for one's own action, before oneself and before others. However, when I say that I ought to do x , I am not saying that I am presently feeling some emotion relative to x ; what I am actually saying is that, in the light of the reasons that I have, and that are largely shaped by a wide range of emotions and sentiments, x is the best thing for me to do, or is the thing that conscience, as the faculty of ultimate practical judgement, requires me to do. In fact, moral judgements can be formulated also in conditions of scarce or null emotional activation, and sometimes they can even clash with our emotional dispositions. This is because our moral judgments do not depend merely on some kind of affective mechanism, but also on a normative theory that durably associates human behaviour with moral approval and disapproval¹⁹. The affective mechanisms are not sufficient to explain moral judgment, and reflective moral judgment can also dispense with on-line emotive activations. Contrary to what is speculated by emotionism, normative concepts are not in themselves emotive facts, even though they may originally spring from emotive experiences: they have to do with the practical capacity of reason to establish which consideration, stemming from emotion, sentiment or reason, deserves the highest normative authority in the circumstances.

Moral concepts refer to the choice of the best reasons on which to act: this does not exclude the relevance of emotions and sentiments in suggesting the considerations to review. Reason is in fact instructed by sentiments, even though it is not the mere slave of the passions. Reason constantly corrects our sentiments and sympathies in the light of more abstract criteria of equality and impartiality, and also of more theoretical considerations relative to moral rights, special relationships and previous events. Reason and sentiments cooperate in constructing our practical identity: in the light of contemporary scientific research on morality, we can also say that the empathic capacity is standardly at the basis of conscience and of the moral faculty. Moreover, it is not a sort of Wittgenstein's ladder, that one may throw away at a certain point: while it is true, as already noted, that a healthy human adult in normal conditions can make moral judgements in a non-emotive, purely rational fashion, it is also

¹⁹ See S. Nichols, *Sentimental Rules*, pp. 3-29). I discussed the limits of a purely sentimentalistic explanation of this normative theory in *The Neosentimentalist Argument Against Moral Rationalism: Some Critical Observations*, «Phenomenology and Mind», n. 3, 2012, pp. 163-175.

true that, in general, human reason must constantly be fuelled by moral emotions and sentiments in order to retain its decisional and motivational power²⁰.

7.

The objection presently more fashionable to moral realism is the one based on the “evolutionary debunking” of morality. According to this view, evolutionary biology explains our moral beliefs referring them to non-moral adaptive pressures going back to millions of years ago. There is no moral “interest” lying behind these pressures, nor any tracking of a supposed moral truth, for these pressures were guided by our selfish genes, competing for survival and reproduction, and by the goal of enhancing the chances of survival and the reproductive fitness of our ancestors. Whatever the supposed “moral truth” might have been, we would have developed certain moral beliefs, because the belief-formation process was guided by those adaptive pressures. Therefore, the best explanation of why we have the moral beliefs that we have, does not make any reference to their tracking the supposed moral truth. This does not amount to a demonstration that our moral beliefs are certainly false, but, failing other considerations, is sufficient to give us excellent reasons to put those beliefs in the list of the dubious things: it would be a very implausible coincidence, indeed, if they should “casually” turn out to be true. Therefore, we should not accept the perspective of being “epistemic slaves to the baby-bearing capacity of our ancestors”²¹. Richard Joyce illustrates the argument with a nice analogy. It is just as if we had taken a pill that makes us believe that Napoleon lost at Waterloo, irrespectively of any evidence on how things really went; coming to know that it is the pill that makes us believe like we do, should make us lose our faith in that belief. We had better to get the antidote, and

²⁰ On this point, see Nichols, *Sentimental Rules*, pp. 27-29. The experience of moral emotions, sentiments and the capacity for empathy are the standard way in which the moral faculty is acquired and retained. However, it seems that they are not necessary conditions of moral judgement, since some autistic individuals manage to make authentic moral judgements in a purely rational manner; see J. Kennett, *Autism, Empathy and Moral Agency*, «The Philosophical Quarterly», 52, 2002, pp. 340-357.

²¹ Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*, p. 219. Similar arguments in M. Ruse, E. O. Wilson, *Moral Philosophy As Applied Science*, «Philosophy», 61, 1986, pp. 173-192; S. Street, *A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value*, *Philosophical Studies* 127, 2006, pp. 109-166; P. Kitcher, *Biology and Ethics*, in D. Copp (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007, pp. 163-185; J. Greene, *Beyond Point-and-Shoot Morality: Why Cognitive (Neuro)Science Matters for Ethics*, «Ethics» 124, 2014, pp. 694-726. According to S. Nichols, the best debunking argument is based on the impropriety of the psychological process of belief-formation (*Process Debunking and Ethics*, «Ethics» 124, 2014, pp. 727-794).

start searching all the relevant evidence to believe one way or the other concerning the outcome of the battle²². This argument may sound as a sort of Nietzschean deconstruction of all morality, not only of moral realism; however, Joyce also notes that, as long as we continue to believe in them, our moral beliefs are in fact highly useful; so, we can end up by continuing to accept them, even when we know that they are false (moral fictionalism)²³. Other thinkers, however, believe that the argument requires that we abandon our present moral beliefs and pursue the rational justification of new moral criteria, independent of our flawed moral intuitions²⁴.

Joyce's analogy – as well as the considerations put forward by Street against what she calls the *tracking account*²⁵ – takes too literally the idea of mind-independence that is associated to realism, not considering the analogical character of the notion, when used in the moral field. There are, in fact, entirely objective and mind-independent facts concerning how things went in Waterloo; but the same does not hold for moral facts and beliefs. As already mentioned a couple of times, there is no such thing as a moral truth existing before any experience of the human condition: it is only this experience, shaped by various natural and social forces, that allows to establish moral truths. In other words, it is only because we learn that certain things promote, and certain other destroy, human happiness, human sociality, and the perfection of human faculties, that objective moral truths do exist; for moral truths are truths regarding human happiness, sociality, and the perfection of human faculties. Joyce and Street wrongly assume that, according to the realistic account, moral truths were objectively written somewhere in the world before the human evolution and that we developed our moral faculty in order to track them. As I said, this is not so. Therefore, it is partly true that these truths exist because evolution made us so; and this means that the truth of certain moral propositions depends on the facts of evolution in a way that cannot be said of Napoleon's defeat in Waterloo, which does not depend in any way on our pills. On the other hand, as noted also by Shafer-Landau, the argument from evolutionary debunking is far from conclusively proving that our moral faculties are *in toto* the result of non-moral evolutionary forces and are, therefore, utterly unreliable. It can be fairly suggested that also our mathematical capacities have partly

²² Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*, pp. 179-181.

²³ Joyce, *The Myth of Morality*.

²⁴ See, for example, P. Singer, *Ethics and Intuitions*, «The Journal of Ethics», 9, 2005, pp. 331-352; J. Greene, *The Secret Joke of Kant's Soul*, in W. Sinnott-Armstrong (ed.), *Moral Psychology, Vol. 3: The Neuroscience of Morality: Emotion, Disease, and Development*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2007, pp. 35-79.

²⁵ Street, *A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value*, pp. 125-127.

evolutionary reasons, but this does not seem to cast any doubt on their reliability in accessing mathematical truths. In any case, the argument would prove too much: if all human faculties of which evolutionary reasons can be given are therefore unreliable, then the philosophical faculties that the critics use to formulate their argument are highly suspect as well²⁶. In other words, the argument fails to consider that the critical capacities enabled by the normative perspective emerges on the evaluative tendencies which are more directly subject to evolutionary pressures, and allows for a reflective evaluation of them: as noted by Street, “the capacity for full-fledged evaluative judgement was a relatively late evolutionary add-on, superimposed on top of much more basic behavioral and motivational tendencies”²⁷. This capacity allows us, on the one hand, to acknowledge that certain dispositions, caused by evolutionary pressures, are in themselves good, because they promote human happiness and perfection; on the other hand, to correct some other natural disposition in the light of more complex and refined moral ideals that we derive from our cultural development. We can thus maintain that certain evolutionary pressures have brought us to adopt certain adaptive responses, and that the dispositions so developed have had as an indirect effect the development of moral beliefs that approach truth; the rational capacity to continually correct these beliefs helps us to further approach the moral facts²⁸. Lastly, if we accept that not all beliefs are the result of selective pressures, and we also accept that there are good reasons for saying that the belief that the survival of *homo sapiens* and of his moral agency are in themselves good is reliable, then we can use this belief as a basis for the evaluation of other moral beliefs, which we consider dictated by their adaptivity²⁹.

Peter Singer is fully right, of course, when he writes that evolution has no moral goal, and that we should not limit ourselves to believe in what evolution led us to think true³⁰. However, it is one thing to say that we possess a reflective faculty through which we can call into question also our deeply-rooted moral intuitions, it is quite another one to say that we can abandon any moral intui-

²⁶ Shafer-Landau, *Evolutionary Debunking, Moral Realism and Moral Knowledge*, pp. 24-25.

²⁷ Street, *A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value*, p. 118. By “basic evaluative tendency”, Street means “an unreflective, non-linguistic, motivational tendency to experience something as ‘called for’ or ‘demanded’ in itself, or to experience one thing as ‘calling for’ or ‘counting in favor of’ something else” (p. 119).

²⁸ According to D. Copp, we can say that, through this process, the Darwinian forces so affected our psychology that our moral beliefs tend to “quasi-track” the moral facts (*Darwinian Skepticism About Moral Realism*, «Philosophical Issues», 18, 2008, pp. 186-206).

²⁹ For more, partly different, arguments against the evolutionary debunking argument, see the paper by G. Pellegrino in this issue.

³⁰ P. Singer, *Ethics and Intuitions*, pp. 342-343 and 348-349.

tion, and devise a purely theoretical moral framework, based on merely formal principles. We can always correct and modify our moral intuitions in the light of further experience, but we will always have to start from that large storage of human experience that are our intuitions. Our best choice is not to take the antidote and restart from scratch, for we would have nothing on which to build; we should work on the intuitions that we have and exert on them our critical capacities.

In conclusion, a conception of moral realism a) based on a non-Kantian conception of practical reason, b) adopting a non-reductionist view of moral properties and c) taking into account the naturalising explanations offered by evolutionary biology, psychology and neuroscience is a highly plausible thesis on the nature of morality, different from either constructivist or Platonist approaches and not vulnerable to traditional anti-naturalistic and sociobiological objections, nor to more recent sentimentalistic and evolutionary ones.

Monographica II
EPISTEMIC DEMOCRACY

GUEST EDITOR'S PREFACE

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Epistemic democracy represents a very fertile ground for the interaction between epistemology and political philosophy, as well as a promising interdisciplinary field where philosophy meets economics, sociology, psychology, political science and other social sciences. Since epistemic democracy can be interpreted as a rather wide research field, it is not always easy to pinpoint central themes or research questions, nor to set clear boundaries. However, there are a few important questions that every epistemic democrat has to settle.

First of all, epistemic democrats have to explain what the epistemic value of democracy is, and how does the epistemic value of democracy contribute to its legitimacy-generating potential¹. Is democracy epistemically valuable because it helps us achieve substantively good (correct, true) decisions, or because it embodies some intrinsic (procedural) epistemic values?

Second, how should epistemic democracy be institutionalized in modern societies²? Assuming that (at least some) political decisions can be true or false,

¹ John Rawls famously shifted the discussion from the legitimacy of states and governments typical for the 19th and early 20th century to the legitimacy of the decision-making process. As Chiara Destri cleverly indicates in her paper, most philosophical positions on political legitimacy take some form of proceduralism - a decision is considered legitimate iff it is a product of a decision-making procedure that has legitimacy-generating potential. The disagreement comes in when we try to define what the source of procedure's legitimacy-generating potential is.

² Some scholars avoid to address the second question. David Estlund, for example, wholeheartedly endorses the idea that the legitimacy-generating potential of democratic decision-making procedure is constituted, in part because of the procedure's (instrumental) epistemic value, yet he rejects the idea that contemporary democratic systems should be modified in order to approximate the best possible democratic procedure. That would lead us to the problem of the second best: Estlund claims that, once we know that a political ideal cannot be met, aiming for the second-best approximation of that ideal need not be the right thing to do. If the ideal is to exclude power from politics, but one party nonetheless uses power to achieve its

are there people who are better at getting it right or wrong? And if there are such people, what role should they play in the democratic decision-making process? Finally, how can our current political institutions be modified to better accommodate and promote the epistemic value of democracy?

These difficult questions have occupied the minds of many prominent thinkers and philosophers who believed that politics could not be done without the concepts of truth and correctness. Plato and Aristotle thus agreed on the answer to the first question, i.e. they agreed that the legitimacy-generating potential of a decision-making procedure comes from its epistemic virtues and its ability to produce good (correct) outcomes. They disagreed on the answer to the second question, with Plato holding that politics (or statecraft), like any other craft, should be done by a few experts specially trained and prepared for this task, and Aristotle defending the idea of the 'wisdom of the crowds', i.e. the idea that, the more people participate in the decision-making process, the better the final decision will be. Similar ideas appeared in and after the Enlightenment, with Rousseau, Condorcet and Mill defending (different) types of democratic decision-making procedures by appealing (at least in part) to the substantive quality of the decisions produced in that manner. Contemporary political philosophy somewhat neglected the epistemic role of democracy³, and though it might seem that Rawls' emphasis on '*political, not metaphysical*' public conception of justice⁴ goes against epistemic democracy, it is important to note that many contemporary defenders of the epistemic conception of democracy take the liberal criterion of legitimacy as a starting point in their argumentation.

SUBSTANTIVE REASONS VS. PROCEDURAL REASONS

political aims (and so the ideal cannot be achieved), maybe we should abandon the ideal altogether and use power ourselves to confront that particular party (i.e. maybe abandoning the ideal will yield better results than holding it no matter what). Having established what the epistemic value of democratic procedure is (first question), we should not ask ourselves how to approximate this value and institutionalize it in real world politics because (as long we cannot mirror the ideal procedure) we would be subjected to the problem of the second best.

³ In contemporary philosophy the epistemic conception of democracy was first established by Joshua Cohen. He set up an account characterized by an independent standard of correct decisions, a cognitive account of voting and an account of decision-making as a process of adjustment of beliefs. For more information, see Cohen, Joshua (1986) An Epistemic Conception of Democracy. *Ethics* Vol. 97, No. 1 (pp. 26-38)

⁴ See Rawls, John (1985) Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical. *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 14, No. 3. (pp. 223-251)

The idea that, in order to be legitimate, a constitution, law, policy or decision has to be acceptable to all qualified citizens, has been thoroughly discussed throughout the past two centuries⁵. Most defenders of epistemic democracy thus believe that no one can legitimately be coerced unless sufficient reasons can be given—reasons that do not violate his reasonable moral (and epistemic) beliefs. In order to be legitimate, a political decision has to be justified by reasons that all reasonable citizens can endorse. Of course, this takes a form of a hypothetical, and not an actual consent - the reasons we use to justify a particular political decision have to be acceptable to reasonable citizens under certain *ideal conditions*. How demanding this public justification will be depends on the kind of reasons used in it.

(1) Some scholars hold that, under certain *ideal conditions*, reasonable citizens would agree on *substantive* reasons for collective decisions⁶. The aim of deliberation is thus to generate consensus, and legitimacy of a particular decision depends on whether shared substantive reasons can justify it. The ideal outcome of such decision-making process is a rationally justified decision, i.e. one everyone has a substantive reason to endorse.

(2) Other scholars believe that, even under *ideal conditions*, reasonable citizens would not be able to agree on *substantive* reasons for most collective decisions⁷. However, they do not think that this implies that political decisions cannot be legitimate. They instead focus on other kind of reasons - *procedural reasons*. These reasons are not about the correctness of a particular decision, but about the qualities of the decision-making procedure that has produced it. Reasonable citizens thus have a procedural reason to endorse a decision that

⁵ Rousseau and Kant are among philosophers who addressed this problem. See Kant, Immanuel (1999) *Practical Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Rousseau, Jean-Jacques (1988) *On the Social Contract*. Indianapolis: Hackett.

⁶ Habermas' conception of democratic legitimacy focuses on political consensus on substantive reasons. See Habermas, Jürgen (1996) *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*. Cambridge: The MIT Press. Moreover, some philosophers who develop substantive conception of Rawls' idea of public reason also believe that political decisions, in order to be legitimate, have to be supported by substantive reasons all reasonable citizens could endorse. See

Quong, Jonathan (2011) *Liberalism Without Perfection*. New York: Oxford University Press.

⁷ Peter explicitly adopts this position, and I believe that Estlund's argument rests on the same ideas. See Peter, Fabienne (2011) *Democratic Legitimacy*. London: Routledge. and Estlund, David (2008) *Democratic Authority*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press. Moreover, the procedural interpretation of Rawls' idea of public reason claims that a political decision can be legitimate if it is produced by a decision-making procedure which all citizens may reasonably be expected to endorse as free and equal.

was produced by a collective decision-making process that has some epistemic qualities. But what these epistemic qualities of a decision-making process are?

Epistemic democrats can either call upon the *intrinsic* epistemic value of democratic procedures or try to develop a more sophisticated argument in favor of the *instrumental* epistemic value of democratic procedures, having in mind that it has to be endorsed by all reasonable citizens. This dilemma constitutes the core of the first question that all epistemic democrats have to answer: what the epistemic value of democracy is and how does the epistemic value of democracy contribute to its legitimacy-generating potential?

EPISTEMIC INTRINSICALISM VS. EPISTEMIC INSTRUMENTALISM

Authors that perceive epistemic qualities of a democratic process as a necessary (though not sufficient) requirement for its legitimacy-generating potential disagree when discussing what represents this epistemic value, as well as what the best institutional arrangement for achieving it is. Most authors believe that the best way for the development of epistemic qualities of democracy can be found in the context of deliberative democracy. However, they disagree on the epistemic value of collective deliberation. For some authors⁸, epistemically valuable procedures are those that have a high probability of producing correct outcomes. The epistemic quality of a procedure is determined by its ability to ‘track the truth’ (veritistic, consequentialist epistemology), and it is this ability that gives legitimacy-generating potential to the already fair procedures. On the other hand, some authors⁹ have argued that collective deliberation has both instrumental and procedural value; however, they emphasized procedural value as the source of legitimacy-generating potential.

(1) Epistemic intrinsicalists¹⁰ build their position on proceduralist epistemology that focuses exclusively on intrinsic qualities of procedures, to judge their epistemic worth. They reject the idea that the procedure-independent standard is necessary to assess the quality of knowledge-producing procedures. These positions often rely on hybrid epistemology¹¹ that combines usually descriptive proceduralist epistemology with normative elements. Not

⁸ For example David Estlund, Joshua Cohen, Robert Talisse and Jose Marti, but also (as far as I can see) all contributors in this issue of the journal.

⁹ See Peter, Fabienne (2011) *Democratic Legitimacy*. London: Routledge.

¹⁰ This position was originally named Pure Epistemic Proceduralism.

¹¹ Longino, Helen (2002) *The Fate of Knowledge*. Princeton: Princeton University Press

every democratic procedure is justified; in order for it to be considered an intrinsically good epistemic procedure (and thus a procedure that has legitimacy-generating qualities), there are several normative conditions that the knowledge-producing process ought to satisfy. As I have emphasized earlier, these conditions are purely procedural, and they do not depend on the ability of the procedure to generate true or correct outcomes (that would be a form of consequentialist epistemology). *First*, publicly recognized forum for the criticism of evidence, methods, assumptions and reasoning should be formed, thus creating space for the critical discourse. *Second*, deliberation should have transformative potential and people should be responsive to one another's arguments. *Third*, publicly recognized standards should be made by reference to which theories and observational practices should be evaluated, thus securing that critical discourse is orderly and constructive. *Finally*, tempered equality of intellectual authority should be established, thus enabling all citizens to actively participate in public deliberation¹². Only if deliberative procedure can satisfy these four normative conditions can it be considered fair and epistemically valuable, regardless of the substantive epistemic quality of the outcomes it produces. Epistemic values are irreducibly procedural—there is nothing beyond engaging critically with one another in a transparent and non-authoritarian way.

(2) Epistemic instrumentalists hold that there exists, independently of an actual decision-making process, a correct decision and that legitimacy of democratic decisions depends, at least in part, on the ability of decision-making process to generate the correct outcome. It invokes veritistic consequentialist epistemology, according to which we evaluate the epistemic value of a certain cognitive practice by evaluating its ability to track the truth, i.e. to produce a correct outcome.

(2.a) Scholars claiming that the democratic decision-making process has instrumental epistemic qualities disagree on whether these qualities are sufficient to give a decision-making procedure legitimacy-generating potential. Some take a *monistic* position¹³ and claim that a procedure with adequate instrumental epistemic qualities has a legitimacy-generating potential - democratic decision-making procedures are thus justified as being necessary for creating decisions of substantive epistemic quality, and the decisions made by them are legitimate because they were made by the procedures that have the

¹² These conditions are specified by Helen Longino, and later used by Fabienne Peter and other proponents of epistemic intrinsicism.

¹³ See Talisse, Robert B. (2009) *Democracy and Moral Conflict*. New York: Cambridge University Press and Misak, Cheryl (2000) *Truth, Morality, Politics: Pragmatism and Deliberation*. New York: Routledge.

greatest instrumental epistemic value, i.e. procedures that have the highest chance of producing correct or true decisions. Alternatively, the aim of producing correct decisions can be replaced with the aim of having correct beliefs, and thus scholars following this argumentative line shall favor political and institutional systems (and not necessary decision-making procedures) that enable belief-revision supported by normative diversity and universal inclusion. The account developed by Marko Luka Zubčić in this issue of the Journal is an example of an instrumentalist monistic position. It focuses on democracy as an institutional arrangement that guarantees certain rights and liberties rather than as a collective decision-making procedure, and follows Mill's instrumentalist argument¹⁴ that focuses on the epistemic benefits of the system's output.

(2.b) Others take non-monistic positions¹⁵, claiming that the instrumental epistemic qualities of a democratic procedure are necessary, but not sufficient condition for its legitimacy-generating potential. These positions emphasize that a decision-making procedure has to be fair in order to have legitimacy-generating potential. Only after we have eliminated unfair decision-making procedures can we differentiate between the fair ones by evaluating their instrumental epistemic qualities, i.e. their ability to produce substantively correct decisions. Ivan Mladenović's account, which builds on Estlund's standard account of epistemic democracy, is a good example of a non-monistic position. The central idea that full justification of the most adequate decision-making procedure should reflect a balance of epistemic and non-epistemic considerations clearly supports this classification.

As I have indicated earlier, instrumentalism represents the dominant approach to the epistemic value of democracy¹⁶. However, it faces a serious challenge - unlike intrinsicism, it has to be able to demonstrate how democratic decision-making procedures improve the substantive quality of the

¹⁴ See Mill, John S. (2008) *On Liberty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. It is important to emphasize, however, that Mill's argument in *On Liberty* deals with negative rights and liberties and focuses on the appropriate institutional arrangement for belief-revision, yet when he discusses positive rights and liberties and focuses on the appropriate decision-making procedure, his argument takes a substantively different form. See Mill, John S. (1977) *Considerations on Representative Government*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. For detailed discussion on the two different argumentative strategies used by Mill, see Cerovac, Ivan (2016) *Plural Voting and Mill's Account of Democratic Legitimacy*. Croatian Journal of Philosophy Vol. 16, No. 46 (pp. 91-106).

¹⁵ This non-monistic account of democratic legitimacy is presented in Estlund, David (2008) *Democratic Authority*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

¹⁶ Fabienne Peter goes so far as to call Estlund's epistemic proceduralism (a non-monistic account that focuses on the instrumental epistemic qualities of a decision-making procedure) a standard account of epistemic democracy.

decisions produced by them. This is why many defenders of epistemic democracy focus on answering the second question - how can epistemic democracy be institutionalized in contemporary societies and how should democratic decision-making procedures be shaped in order to have proper (instrumental) epistemic value.

INSTITUTIONALIZING EPISTEMIC DEMOCRACY

Epistemic instrumentalists and epistemic intrinsicalists agree that not all democratic decision-making procedures have equal legitimacy-generating potential. Some democratic procedures have better epistemic qualities and consequently have greater legitimacy-generating potential. There are many qualities of a decision-making procedure that can affect its epistemic value, including the role it gives to the experts in politics, the way in which the decisions are made (pre-deliberation or post-deliberation voting) and the level of participation and inclusion of citizens. Furthermore, the socio-economic system in which the collective decision-making procedure takes place can also influence its epistemic value. Two qualities of democratic procedure deserve our special attention:

(1) Many defenders of epistemic democracy, especially those with a background in moral and political philosophy, are skeptical about the role of experts in the democratic decision-making process¹⁷. After all, acknowledging that there are experts in politics and giving them greater political influence might endanger democratic ideals and lead to some form of epistocracy - the rule of 'those who know'. Other epistemic democrats, those with a background in epistemology, fear that abandoning the idea of expertise on many public and political issues might greatly endanger the substantive quality of the decisions produced by the democratic decision-making process. Snježana Prijić-Samaržija's paper addresses this problem and offers a persuasive argument

¹⁷ Both Estlund and Peter are very careful when they discuss the role of experts in a democratic society. In her earlier work Peter doubts that there are experts in politics, claiming that sometimes the relevant knowledge is so widely dispersed that no one can be considered an expert. Estlund, on the other hand, believes that there are experts in politics, but since we cannot agree on who they are, we cannot ascribe them political authority on the reasons everyone could endorse.

based on veritistic, consequentialist epistemology and focused on the idea of the division of epistemic labor¹⁸.

I believe that this disagreement is, at least in part, caused by the imprecise use of the term 'decision-making process'. Many often refer to democracy as a collective decision-making process, but what they have in mind is a system in which the supreme power and authority is vested in the people, and not in some particular individual or a group. Democracy is the actual collective *authorization* of laws and policies by the people subject to them¹⁹. This says very little about how laws and policies are made - they could, for all we know, be made by a small group of people or even by one individual. The important thing is that the source of their authority and legitimacy is democratic *decision-authorizing* process. This means that we can have laws and policies made by experts but still claim that the authority of these laws and policies does not come from the expertise of those who have made them, but from the consent of the people subject to them²⁰.

2) The procedure people use to authorize (but also to make) political decisions defines to a great extent the substantive quality of the decisions thus produced. The way how citizens cast their votes, how they regulate abstentions, but also how they directly participate in the decision-making process by initiating referendums influence the epistemic value of democratic procedures. These very important issues are sometimes neglected in the normative political philosophy and Sebastian Linares Lejarraga's paper in this issue of the journal brings many original democratic innovations aimed at improving citizen participation by fostering autonomous, informed and public oriented preferences in citizens.

It is important to emphasize that both the inclusion of experts in the decision-making processes and the strengthening of participatory democratic mechanisms contribute to the epistemic value of democratic procedures. These are compatible practices that have to be balanced and used together in order to promote the full epistemic potential of democratic deliberation.

¹⁸ Kitcher and Christiano have offered very good arguments that connect democracy with expertise. For more information, see Kitcher, Philip (2011) *Science in a Democratic Society*. New York: Prometheus Books. and Christiano, Thomas (2012) Rational deliberation among experts and citizens. In: Parkinson, J. (ed.), *Deliberative Systems: Deliberative Democracy at the Large Scale*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁹ Estlund, David (2008) *Democratic Authority*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press (p. 38)

²⁰ See Festenstein, Matthew (2010) Truth and Trust in Democratic Epistemology. In: Tinnevelt, Ronald and Geenens, Raf (eds.) *Does Truth Matter? Democracy and Public Space*. Dordrecht: Springer.

RIGHT OR WRONG, IT'S DEMOCRACY. LEGITIMACY, JUSTIFICATION AND THE INDEPENDENT CRITERION

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“To find a form of association that may defend and protect with the whole force of the community the person and property of every associate, and by means of which each, joining together with all, may nevertheless obey only himself, and remain as free as before.” Such is the fundamental problem of which the social contract provides the solution. (Rousseau 1763, 163)

ABSTRACT

Contemporary normative theories of democracy generally aim to show that democratic outcomes are legitimate and hence they ought to be obeyed. As it is known, the battlefield is split between two major approaches: instrumentalism and proceduralism. Yet, many philosophers of both approaches seem to overlook one distinction that ought to be crucial in their reasoning - or so I argue in this paper. First, I highlight this distinction between the justification of outcomes on one hand, and their legitimacy on the other. If the justification of outcomes is unachievable given circumstances of pluralism and disagreement, their legitimacy derives from the procedures that bring them about. Hence both accounts present a justification of democratic procedures by reference to a criterion that is independent from the procedures themselves. Second, I propose to distinguish between instrumentalism and proceduralism on the basis of the connection that these approaches draw between the justifying criterion and democratic procedures. While for instrumentalism this is contingent and indirect, for proceduralism it is direct and necessary. Finally, I take into account two well-known taxonomies in epistemic democracy, which are provided by David Estlund and Fabienne Peter, and I argue

that both blur the distinction between the justification of outcomes and their legitimacy and are thus unsatisfactory and misleading.

KEYWORDS

Democracy, instrumentalism, proceduralism, legitimacy, David Estlund, Fabienne Pete

INTRODUCTION

We live under democratic regimes. We don't live too badly and we think this depends (in part) on the fact that we live under democratic regimes. Hence, we may find those regimes *good* in this respect. That is, we can reasonably think that we have good, even conclusive, reasons to take democracy as justified and thus to want to establish democratic institutions. But does this mean that we also ought to obey democratic outcomes? Are we to take these outcomes as legitimate even though we may sometimes find them plainly wrong? In my paper I want to tackle these two related issues that concern democracy¹, its justification and legitimacy, and inquire about their relation.

I have two aims in this paper. First of all, I intend to clarify a small confusion that happens to blur the debate: the one between particular outcomes and democratic procedures. This may seem a minor point, but it is relevant if we aim to account for the so-called circumstances of politics (Waldron 1999) and if we want to accommodate disagreement over what are the best decisions to take. In order to understand why the fact that we disagree over some specific outcomes does *not* immediately give us reasons to disobey, we need to bear in mind that justification and legitimacy of a single decision are different questions. If that is the case, the legitimacy of democratic outcomes depends on the kind of procedure that issued them².

¹ In this paper, I take democracy canonically to stand for majority rule of decision-making and fundamental rights protection and to be constituted by deliberative and voting processes. Thus, my analysis concerns both aggregative and deliberative models of democracy.

² As Peter (2016) argues, there are at least three grounds for legitimacy: consent, beneficial effects and democratic procedure. While the former identifies legitimate authority with individuals' consenting to it (and thus conveys no normative force); the second revolves around authority's beneficial consequences and requires people to obey

Once we turn to the justification of democratic procedures, we are at a crossroads. There are two well-known broad approaches to the justification of democracy: instrumentalism and proceduralism. My second aim in this paper is to propose a new ground to draw a line between these two and to reframe such opposition as instrumentalism versus intrinsicalism. Insofar as both accounts distinguish between outcome legitimacy and outcome justification, they ought to provide a justification of democracy that can secure the legitimacy of its outcomes, especially when they are unjustifiable. Following David Estlund's criticism of fair proceduralism (2008), I argue that both do so with respect to a value or a set of value that works as procedure-independent criterion. While instrumentalism conceives the relationship between such criterion and democratic process as contingent, albeit sufficient, to produce on average substantively good outcomes; intrinsicalism takes democracy to be a necessary condition for the realization of the independent criterion that justifies democracy, according to each different account.

Therefore, I intend to argue that: (a) a proper justification requires to conceive an independent criterion that acts as justifier of democracy; (b) the connection between such criterion and democracy itself may be either necessary or contingent. Then, I aim to show how this distinction clarifies some confusion in the current debate on epistemic democracy. Whereas certain accounts are clearly instrumentalist (Goodin and List 2001, Goodin 2003, Landemore 2013), others qualify themselves as proceduralist (Estlund 2008, Peter 2008). If my argument is so far sound, then both the focus on the justification of procedures and the distinction between instrumentalism and intrinsicalism may help shed light to these last two approaches. On one hand, both Estlund and Peter propose taxonomies of current democratic accounts that end up concealing the distinction between instrumentalism and intrinsicalism. On the other, in Estlund's case, such confusion induces him to misunderstand his own standing in the debate, or so I try to argue.

The paper is organized as follows. The first section regards the distinction between justification and legitimacy of outcomes. I criticize approaches to democracy that merge these two dimensions and I take Waldron's circumstances of politics to be a good reason to draw a line

authority insofar as it brings positive outcomes. My whole paper will stand within the third category and I won't discuss the other two.

between the two. I also argue that outcome legitimacy ought to depend entirely on the procedure that issues it.

Section two introduces a reformulation of the possible justifications of democracy and proposes to use an independent criterion whose connection to democracy serves as a qualifier of the justificatory approach. Finally, in section three I show that, based on the previous arguments, both Peter's and Estlund's taxonomies are unsatisfactory, and argue for focusing on the distinction between outcome legitimacy and outcome justification.

I

Both justification and legitimacy are multifaceted concepts that can regard different domains of normative political theory. First, we can say that a *decision* is justified or legitimate, and we mean different things by using one adjective or the other. But second, we can also question the justification or legitimacy of the political *authority* that issues such decisions or, we can wonder whether the exercise of *coercive power* in the society we live in is justified or legitimate³. Finally, we can ask whether a certain specific *procedure* for taking the decision is legitimate or justified. All these attributions are slightly but importantly different and make the distinction between these two concepts more confused for anyone who addresses it⁴.

The first thing to notice is that justification and legitimacy convey different meanings. In a very general sense, when we claim that a certain decision is justified we mean that there are conclusive reasons in its

³ As both Peter (2013) and Perry (2013) notice, there are at least two approaches to the problem of political legitimacy: the first is authority-based (Raz 1986, Christiano 2004, 2008, Perry 2013), while the second is coercion-based (Ripstein 2004, Rawls 2005, Estlund 2008). A proper inquiry over the meaning and functioning of the concept of legitimacy is beyond the aims of this paper, as I will only tackle the issue of justification of democracy and hold that this is a necessary condition for the legitimacy of its outcomes.

⁴ The last forty years of debate over the issue of public justification have also possibly made things more confused, as it has collapsed the two concepts. Following Rawls (2005), the use of coercive power has been defined as legitimate to the extent that it was able to appear justified to all reasonable people. For a criticism of Rawlsian approach see Simmons 1999. For a proceduralist interpretation of the requirement of public reason that makes it a pure proceduralist justification of democracy see Peter 2008, 95-100.

favor⁵. Conversely, the notion of legitimacy refers to a specific right to rule that any political authority has over those subjected to it⁶. When these two concepts are applied to political decisions and laws, they have two different implications. On one hand, a justified political decision is a decision for which there are conclusive reasons or that I can accept. On the other, a legitimate political decision is a decision that ought to be obeyed. Since Jean-Jacques Rousseau's forerunner account of democratic legitimacy, theories of democracy have confronted themselves with this problem and have tried to answer it by offering a decision-making procedure that yields collective decisions that are binding on all and that nonetheless respect individuals' freedom and will (Rousseau 1763, 163). There are two possible takes on this issue and both have been explored by democratic theorists. I will only mention the first and I will focus on the second.

The first attempt can be exemplified by Jürgen Habermas's and Joshua Cohen's accounts of deliberative democracy (Habermas 1996, Cohen 1997a, 1997b). According to their models, majority rule and equal right to participation do not constitute the only central features of democracy, but are rather completed by the idea of deliberation⁷. Here I cannot provide a proper account of the functions that deliberation is meant to fulfill, contrary to traditional aggregative approaches to democracy (Arrow 1963). It will suffice to say that since the "public discourse mediates between reason and will" (Habermas 1996, 475-476),

⁵ For the purposes of this article I need not to take stance on what counts as a normative reason (see Raz 2011) or on a specifically externalist or internalist account of justification (see Gaus 1996). So I will only refer to justification in the very general sense of 'conclusive considerations in favor of'.

⁶ Concerning political legitimacy, not only there are different approaches to it, as mentioned in note 4, but the very concept of normative legitimacy has been taken to identify different kinds of 'right to rule'. On one reading, legitimacy consists in a justification-right to use coercion, without any political obligation on the part of those subject to political power (Ladenson 1980, Buchanan 2002, Estlund 2008, Kolodny 2014a, 2014b). On the other reading, instead, legitimacy is a claim-right to command, which entails a duty to obey (Simmons 1979, 1999, Christiano 2004, 2008, 2013, Lefkowitz 2005). In what follows I will refer to legitimacy as imposing a duty to obey, but my analysis remains neutral with respect to this distinction and maintains its validity also with the first interpretation of legitimacy.

⁷ Deliberative democratic theories, although declining, are one of the fundamental paradigms of democracy of the last thirty years. I will not provide an account of it or of its supporters' different, as here I focus on its epistemic version. For a general introduction see Bohman and Rehg 1997, Besson and Marti 2006.

it allows deliberative democracy to enjoy both legitimacy and justification. Indeed, the deliberative-democratic process, as long as it is conducted according to certain ideal procedural criteria, represents both a necessary and a sufficient condition to produce a rationally justified collective decision. According to Habermas, because the aim of deliberation as described by the ideal speech situation is to reach consensus, this decision will be justified to everyone's lights. According to Cohen, who heavily draws on Rawls's ideas of public justification and original position (Rawls 1971, 15-19), a properly constrained deliberative process will yield outcomes that all will find acceptable. In both cases, deliberative democratic procedures that respect their ideal counterpart will ensure both justification and legitimacy; that is, they will generate outcomes justified rationally and hence binding. As a consequence, these accounts put together the two concepts of justification and legitimacy by claiming that all and only justified decisions are decisions which we ought to obey⁸.

There are two problems with such a position. Firstly, it depends on the role of consensus or public acceptability. Either deliberation ensures that all outcomes are justified to all or majority rule will intervene to cut discussion and finalize a decision irrespective of unanimity. But because in such a case the collective decision won't be justified to all, those who disagree will wonder why they should accept it and will hence question its legitimacy. But secondly, and more importantly, it blurs the distinction between actual procedures and ideal ones. If Habermas' and Cohen's point is that all actual democratic outcomes are legitimate because they are justified to all, this is simply not true. We happen to disagree a lot, and there are many democratic decisions that we find wrong. On the other hand, if they mean that actual democratic decisions are justified because they could have been the result of an ideal democratic procedure, then it is their conformity to the ideal procedure that makes them both justified and legitimate. But if that is the case, the ideal procedure ends up being a substantive criterion of evaluation, albeit procedurally constructed, that applies directly to outcomes and is

⁸ The project of public justification as well, in its substantive interpretation, can be taken exemplify such a position. See, among many, Rawls 2005, Quong 2011, Gaus 1996, 2011, D'Agostino 1996. However, it is important to notice that: (a) the consensus model refers only to *reasonable* acceptability and hence does not require unanimous consensus; (b) the public justification approach is not susceptible to the criticism I lay out further in the text against Habermas's and Cohen's accounts.

indifferent to their democratic pedigree⁹. For instance, an omniscient dictator who were able to reconstruct the ideal deliberative procedure in his head would be much more effective in producing justified, hence legitimate, results. But this means that we lose sight of the link between the outcomes of ideal democratic procedures and the outcomes of actual democratic ones. As a result, the fact that collective decisions have been made by actual democratic procedures is neither a necessary nor a sufficient reason to take them as legitimate, unless their content also conforms to the one that would have been issued by ideal procedures. In the end, we have either over-legitimation or under-legitimation (see Ottonelli 2012), because actual decisions are both unjustified and illegitimate or legitimate and justified.

The second solution pursues a different strategy, as it draws a clear-cut line between the justification of outcomes and their legitimacy. According to these stances, the fact of pluralism and disagreement make it impossible for each and every decision to get universal approval. As Jeremy Waldron reproaches to John Rawls, we do not only happen to have divergent comprehensive doctrines, but we also disagree over the very public conception of justice that reasonable citizens ought to share, according to Rawls¹⁰. Therefore, we cannot cling to it in order to justify collective decisions, as they inevitably won't appear so to all those citizens who in good faith disagree over what justice requires (Waldron 1999, 149-154). By modifying Rawls's circumstances of justice (Rawls 1971, 109-112), Waldron sets up what he calls the 'circumstances of politics', which specify the conditions that make politics both possible and necessary (Waldron 1999, 101-106). These are the fact of disagreement and the need of cooperation. As he says, disagreement matters because we need to take collectively binding decisions, as otherwise, if we did not need to cooperate, we would not care about disagreeing. On the other hand, if we all agreed on what to do on each and every instance, we would not experience the necessity for

⁹ For this reason Peter includes Habermas' deliberative democratic model among perfectly proceduralist, rather than purely proceduralist accounts (Peter 2008, 71). For the distinction between pure, perfect and imperfect proceduralism see Rawls 1971, 85.

¹⁰ Rawls posits a fundamental distinction between the political conception of justice, on which reasonable citizens in a Well-Ordered Society agree, and comprehensive doctrines characterized by the fact of reasonable pluralism under contemporary liberal-democratic regimes, as he states in *Political Liberalism*. See Rawls 2005.

collectively binding decisions because we would act according to our own judgment¹¹.

In a way, it seems plausible to wonder whether we could still talk of legitimacy without disagreement over what to do. If we were to agree with every single collective decision, either because we take it to be intrinsically just or correct, or because we find it instrumentally useful to realize our aims and ends, we would never face circumstances where we ought to obey to decision we strongly disagree with¹². A little thought-experiment may be of help here. If we lived in a very bizarre social world where we all agreed on every single issue and we knew that we so agreed, it seems reasonable to think that we would be able to harmonize spontaneously and act according to our common knowledge. We would live in the realization of Thomas Hobbes's wild dream of ants and bees, whose communities are immune to disagreement and which are able to coordinate following a natural hierarchy (Hobbes 1651, 113)¹³. To be sure, we would still have to take collective decisions in order to coordinate and hence would need a decision-making procedure of some kind. But, by hypothesis, almost any decision-making procedure would do, since we would know that we would agree on each and every decision. We could take decisions democratically or autocratically; we could vote or we could select by lot one of us taking decisions always or only for a certain amount of time. Certainly not any decision-making procedure would treat all of us in the same way, as for instance the autocrat would get to decide everything on her own. However, it seems difficult to think that this would be a problem, because the final decision would be one on which we all agreed and none of us would feel to have it imposed upon him and he would know that. The demand for legitimacy arises when a decision, which we deemed unjustified, is imposed on us. If we

¹¹ One possible objection to this kind of argument regards *akrasia*, that is, the fact that people violate their own judgment of what is the best thing to do (on which by hypothesis they agree with all others). As I said earlier in the article, in this case we would still need political authority, but with the considerably weakened function to handle *akrasia*. Another objection concerns coordination problems, like on what side of the road to drive. Here, there is no better decision, as both sides are fine as long as we coordinate on one of them. Here a decision-making procedure would still be necessary, but since we would be indifferent with respect to the specific decision taken, it seems hard to believe that a proper issue of legitimacy would arise.

¹² In a relevant way, we could not be said to *obey* to anything, since we would respect the law willingly and spontaneously, even though this depends on what we take obedience to consist of, and it is true only if we take it to require some sort of disagreement with the reasons behind the law.

¹³ A similar thought is expressed by David Estlund. See Estlund 2008, 71.

were to agree (and know that all of us agree) on all collective decisions, the only problem of political authority would be to ensure compliance with these decisions by akratic citizens. And since the main function of political authority would be to handle akrasia, we would perhaps be able to forsake democracy¹⁴.

In another closer, but still quite bizarre world, we could agree on every decision as well, without knowing that we do so agree. In such a world, we would have greater need for a decision-making procedure, because we would not be sure that we really agree on what to do. Decision-making procedures would deploy only an epistemic and detective function, as they would just make clear to all what the agreed-upon decisions were. However, in such a world we would not share these decisions as common knowledge, hence the need for a detective procedure, and we would not be sure of our agreement. In fact, from this world inhabitants' point of view, there would be no way to distinguish between a world where such unanimous consent is near at hand and one where it is not. Therefore, decision-making procedures would have to be justified *irrespective* of whether unanimity is available or not, because people who followed them would be uncertain about their capacity to reach generally justifiable decisions. Under these conditions, the issue of legitimacy would arise and take form and substance, since there would be the actual possibility that we ought to obey to decisions we disagreed about.

Waldron's intuition seems to be that fairness and justice are on different levels. While the latter concerns our different worldviews, life plans, moral and religious conceptions, which happen to differ, pace Rawls, the former defines what are the *fair* conditions to handle disagreement over justice (Waldron 1999, 195-198). In particular, under conditions of pluralism and disagreement, fairness requires that decisions everyone ought to abide by be produced in a way that respects the fact that people may disagree over those decisions. Therefore, the legitimacy of laws and policies does not depend on their substantive value, but by the fact that they have been generated according to a fair

¹⁴ Given the problem of akrasia and in general the possibility of people acting to pursue their self-interest rather than the justified decision (on which they would still agree, though), there would still be the need of a political authority that exercised coercive power. What I contend is that such authority would not need to be democratic and, if it were, the reasons for this would be very different from our actual justifications of democracy, given disagreement.

procedure, which respects each citizen's own judgment on the issue at hand. But since only democracy attributes an equal right to a say to every citizen, democracy is the only fair, hence legitimate procedure.

This switch from the justification of particular decisions to a focus on decision-making procedures that yield them is behind most current theories of democratic legitimacy (Waldron 1999, Estlund 2008, Christiano 2008, 2013, Peter 2008, 2016). These theories offer a procedural account of the legitimacy of collective decisions by claiming that said legitimacy depends on the way these decisions have been made. Since they are made democratically, this provides them with a particular right to rule, irrespective of their substantive justification. Since the specific content of particular decisions does not play a role in their being legitimate, the problem of justification of each decision is foregone and replaced with the problem of its legitimacy. For this reason, proceduralist accounts of democratic legitimacy can better answer the problem of disagreement. In fact, they do not ask citizens to take all collectively binding decisions as justified, but only to recognize their legitimacy in virtue of the procedures that lent them.

Nevertheless, while I think that this sort of argument convincingly shows why to draw a line between justification and legitimacy of collective decisions, it does not *directly* support democracy. That is, democracy as a decision-making procedure need not be justified given the fact of disagreement, as there could be perfectly convincing reasons that defend democracy even when we all agree¹⁵. The problem is that any political regime that claims to lend legitimate outcomes has to take disagreement into account. Despite current justifications of democracy (e.g. Waldron 1999, Christiano 2008), the former example illustrates how disagreement is morally significant only to the extent that we have to abide by decisions that we might find wrong. Therefore, it is not the distinctive working of democracy that depends on the fact of disagreement; rather, it is the question of legitimacy, which arises only conditionally on it. Democracy is but one, albeit purportedly the best, way to account for the procedural legitimacy of collective decisions.

However, contrary to what Waldron seems to hold, this does not settle all disputes. In fact, two objections can be moved towards his account.

¹⁵ For instance, if we think that a procedure ought to treat people as equals, this can be true and worthwhile irrespective of the fact that those equals agree on the final decision to make. However, in this case we could assess the justice of the said procedure and we would not deal with its legitimacy, as people would still end up complying with outcomes because they agree with them and not despite they think they are wrong.

First, if it is undoubtedly true that matters of justice are controversial, as Waldron reproaches to Rawls, it is indeed also true that matters of procedure and of procedural fairness are controversial as well (e.g. Christiano 2000, Enoch 2007). Perhaps we can safely say that democracy is at least morally permissible, if not plainly the fairest possible decision-making procedure. But, even if we can hope to reach such unanimous consensus, which is unlikely if we confront ourselves with all human societies in all times, still there would be room to argue over which kind of democracy would be the best or most suited to us. The simple fact that democracy is fair would not help us to adjudicate between a more populist, more 'epistocratic', more liberal or more majoritarian democracy, *if all these versions of democracy crucially hinge on the conception of fairness we embrace*. Given that disagreement touches also on what is the best and fairest decision-making procedure, even within a more or less democratic framework, we need a clear justification of democracy that ought to provide us with reasons to infer from the specific value of democracy the legitimacy of its outcomes. Moreover, it is not as clear as Waldron thinks that fairness and justice are at two different levels, where the former is prior and trumping with respect to the latter. Since what is really fair is also controversial, why should we do without justice for the sake of fairness?

Second, Waldron's account falls prey of the same weakness that affects all other fairness-based justifications of democracy and that has been phrased by David Estlund. Not only is there not one unique fair way to take decisions, but also procedural fairness does not seem to suffice to provide a convincing justification of democracy. If we take fairness in its most basic interpretation as 'full anonymity', we can see how the fact that a procedure is blind to personal features is not enough to take it as justified. Or at least, when we try to justify democracy, procedural fairness is not all that matters, for otherwise we would be contented with a decision-making procedure by lottery or by the renown coin flip (Estlund 2008, 72-84). Therefore, in order to make sense of both deliberation and voting, we ought to make reference to substantive values, as procedural fairness won't get us far enough¹⁶. Epistemic

¹⁶ I make explicit reference to deliberation and voting because these are the main features of current justifications of democracy, especially in its epistemic version. However, Estlund's argument also works with aggregative conception of democracy, insofar as they take decision-making procedures to be sensitive to people's beliefs and preferences. Insofar as these procedures ought to be responsive to individuals'

accounts of democracy have recently flourished with this precise aim to complete or replace fairness-based justification of democratic legitimacy by appealing to its epistemic quality (Cohen 1986, Goodin and List 2001, Estlund 2008, Peter 2008, Landemore 2013). Among them, Estlund's epistemic proceduralism is one of the most influential and the one that explicitly states the distinction between the outcome justification and outcome legitimacy. But why should we take the fact that collective decisions have been made democratically to be a sufficient reason to obey them even if they are wrong?

II

Once the distinction between outcome justification and outcome legitimacy is fixed, the focus switches to democratic procedures, and a proper theory of democracy ought to offer a workable and convincing justification of these procedures. To claim that democracy is fair, in the sense of being fully anonymous, would not do, because this would not grasp the distinctiveness of democracy with respect to lot or coin flip and because mere fairness does not appear as a good reason to obliterate outcome justification, especially when we are dealing with very wrong decisions¹⁷. There is something more to democracy, and the problem of its justification consists in giving good reasons to abide by democratic decisions, despite some of them might turn out to be wrong¹⁸.

Let us take a step back, though. Once the focus is perspicuously set on the justification of procedures, to talk of proceduralism and procedural values can become quite confusing. As it is well known, normative theories that justify democracy are usually divided in two broad categories: instrumentalism and proceduralism. However, since both of them deal with procedures, as it is manifest so far, both accounts cannot but be 'procedural' in a way, as these are the objects they set up to

preference rankings, aggregative accounts make reference to procedure-independent standards for outcomes as well. See Estlund 2008, 72-76.

¹⁷ Although I won't deal with such an issue, it is important to observe how this distinction between outcome legitimacy and outcome justification leaves open the problem of how to react when outcomes are too unjust. Different accounts of the justifying value of democratic procedures will propose different, albeit similar, accounts of the limits of democratic legitimacy and ought to be completed by theories that explain when and to what extent democratic decisions are not legitimate anymore and civil disobedience is justified.

¹⁸ John A. Simmons would argue that any justification of democracy would not suffice to lend legitimacy to its outcomes, because said legitimacy can only rest on consent. He might have a point in holding that to say that that a political regime is just does not necessarily entail that it has a right to rule. However, this in turn does not mean that consent is the only ground of legitimacy either. See Simmons 1979, 1999.

justify. This must have been the thought behind Estlund's proposed taxonomy of different accounts of democracy, which basically consists in an opposition between 'impartial proceduralism', on the one hand, and 'epistemic theories', on the other (Estlund 2008, 102). But let us proceed with order. How can proceduralism be a meaningful account of justification for a procedure? Hoping to shed some light, I will now reframe the traditional distinction in a distinction between instrumentalism and '*intrinsicism*'.

If Estlund's criticism of procedural fairness is sound, any acceptable justification of democracy ought to present a procedure-independent value or a set of values according to which democracy itself is justifiable as a morally permissible or best decision-making procedure in the market. Call this the procedure-independent criterion of justification. Instrumentalists do so by taking democracy to be a means to something else, which is the 'real value' they are after. It can be equality, as it is with Richard Arneson (2003), or it can be some moral virtue, which the democratic process allows citizens to realize through participation, with John Stuart Mill (1861). Be it its direct outcome or its by-product, still democratic procedure is taken to be the best way to achieve such result. However, democracy does so only in a contingent way: it is not the only possible way to achieve such result, although it can be the most effective one under nowadays contingent conditions. It is not that such justification is piecemeal, as Thomas Christiano claims¹⁹, because we can consistently take it to be valid for all subjects and for all outcomes. In fact, any instrumentalist account, so long as it proposes a justification of democratic *procedures*, will confer legitimacy to all democratic outcomes. The point is that outcome legitimacy depends on the justification of democratic procedure according to an independent criterion that applies contingently and indirectly to the said procedure.

Let us take the famous Condorcet Jury Theorem as an example (Condorcet 1785)²⁰. It says that if three conditions obtain, then the more people there will be for a certain option, the likelier it will be that the

¹⁹ Thomas Christiano proposes to draw a distinction between piecemeal and holistic justifications and states that instrumentalist justification will depend on the subject and on the class of decisions taken, thus being piecemeal, while proceduralist accounts are holistic, because they ground democratic authority in the same way for all citizens (Christiano 2006).

²⁰ For arguments in favor of and against the CJT as a good epistemic justification of democracy see: Grofman and Feld 1988, Estlund, et al. 1989, Goodin and List 2001, Goodin 2003, Estlund 2008.

option is right. The three conditions are: (1) that there is a binary choice, where one option is right and the other wrong; (2) that the average competence of voting population is better than random; (3) that people cast their vote independently from one another. If the second condition is not satisfied, then the mechanism reverses and the more people want option A, the likelier it will be that A is wrong. Although such a theorem is an instrumentalist justification of democracy, that draws its value from the substantive quality of its outcomes, it still qualifies democracy as *necessarily* getting the right results. What about the contingency? The point is that the Condorcet Jury Theorem takes democratic procedures to be justified only contingently, insofar as the underlying three conditions hold, and only as one possible way, among others, to get the right result.

Therefore, according to instrumentalism, it is not because the procedure has some quality in itself that its outcomes ought to be obeyed. Rather, the procedure is justified because it tends to produce *on average* outcomes that respect the procedure-independent criterion of justification. Given the distinction between outcome legitimacy and outcome justification, it is easy to see how instrumentalists can easily account for wrong decisions. In fact, it is both perfectly plausible and possible that certain democratic outcomes will be wrong. However, they will still retain their legitimacy, if democracy can be shown to produce on average correct results.

On the contrary, intrinsicalism conceives the relation between the independent criterion and democracy in a quite different way. In fact, the kind of values that justify democracy is achieved *necessarily* through that process. Hence, democratic procedures play a determinant role, as they represent a necessary condition for the realization of the justifying value, whose fulfillment cannot be obtained without democracy. It is still a procedure-independent criterion, because it is logically distinct from *actual* democratic procedures to which it refers. However, there are no other ways to realize the independent criterion without democracy being realized (e.g. Christiano 2008, Peter 2008). In a way, democracy may be said to embody such value and thus cannot be left aside if we want that value to become real. In this sense, intrinsicalist accounts are all those which take democratic procedures to be “constitutive of legitimacy” (Peter 2008, 64) in a way alien to instrumentalism. However, this does not depend on the fact that intrinsicalism avoids relying on a procedure-independent criterion (Peter 2008, 64), but only on the kind of necessary and direct connection that intrinsicalism devises between said criterion

and democracy itself²¹. On both accounts, democratic outcomes are legitimate even if they might be wrong. On intrinsicalist account, however, these outcomes retain their legitimacy although they might be *all* wrong, because the reason for democracy itself to be justified is independent from the kind of decisions it makes on average.

III

I think that the distinction between intrinsicalism and instrumentalism can help shed light on some confusions that happen to affect two main accounts of the so-called epistemic proceduralism and their related taxonomies: Fabienne Peter's and David Estlund's. I intend to argue, on the one hand, that while Estlund's account rightly distinguishes between justification and legitimacy of democratic decisions, it ends up misconceiving the opposition of intrinsicalism and instrumentalism. As a consequence, he disguises himself as a pure proceduralist when he in fact holds a mixed account. On the other hand, I argue that Peter neglects the distinction between outcome legitimacy and outcome justification, with the result of putting properly proceduralist accounts of democracy under the same category, as Estlund's²², and accounts like Pettit's or Habermas's, which make outcome legitimacy rest (also) on outcome justification, rather than only on procedures.

According to Peter, while pure proceduralism draws on political equality²³, rational proceduralism makes reference to *both* political equality *and* the quality of democratic outcomes (Peter 2008, 67). Following Christiano (2004), Peter qualifies this latter account as dualistic, because it takes two dimensions of evaluation into consideration when justifying democracy: the process itself and the quality of its outcomes. This might seem very similar to the way I drew

²¹ As a consequence, any criticism against instrumentalism that pinpoints to its lack of respect for pluralism and disagreement because it fails to acknowledge such constitutive relation between democracy and legitimacy misfires. It is true that instrumentalism recognizes only an indirect and contingent connection between any justifying criterion and democracy, but once democracy is taken to be justified, then all its outcomes will be legitimate.

²² I define Estlund's account properly proceduralist because he takes legitimacy to rest on the justification of procedures. However, since said justification happens to be both intrinsicalist and instrumental, his account qualifies as mixed or dualistic and not as purely procedural or simply intrinsicalist.

²³ Peter refers to political fairness and political equality as synonyms. Since Estlund's criticism of fairness, I take Peter to identify political fairness with a less procedural and more substantive account of political equality. See Peter 2008, 81-86.

the distinction between instrumentalism and intrinsicism earlier on. However, Peter's category of rational proceduralism, in its aggregative, deliberative and epistemic forms, fails to acknowledge a very relevant distinction. Peter puts accounts that are mixed forms of intrinsicism and instrumentalism under the same category, as Estlund's rational epistemic proceduralism, as she dubs it, and other accounts that are intrinsicist with a specific requirement of rationality that applies to *every and each* outcomes (Pettit 2001)²⁴. While Estlund preserves the distinction between outcome legitimacy and outcome justification, by making reference only to the justification of procedures (that lends in turn outcome legitimacy), Pettit intrinsically justifies democracy, but adds to it the justification of every democratic outcome in order to achieve their legitimacy. However, if we ought to obey to democratic decisions only when they are also justified, we end up pursuing the same mistaken strategy that we ruled out at the beginning.

A similar taxonomical problem affects Estlund's epistemic proceduralism, because of an even more blurred account of the distinction between outcomes and procedures. This happens despite the fact that Estlund manifestly recognizes the distinction between legitimacy and justification concerning outcomes. As he says, the question with legitimacy is to provide "moral reasons to comply, not epistemic reasons to believe" (Estlund 2008, 106) and any convincing justification of democracy ought to account for such a distinction if it wants to avoid the problem of deference (Estlund 2008, 102-104). This problem concerns all those epistemic theories that identify justification with legitimacy.

As we have seen, according to accounts supporting this identification, democratic decisions ought to be obeyed only insofar as they are justified. However, while Habermas's and Cohen's accounts refer to justification in the sense of consensus or public justifiability and refrain from truth or correctness, epistemic accounts take legitimacy to rely on correctness or truth. Thus, when deliberativists like Habermas and Cohen hold all and only justified decisions to be legitimate, they do not incur in the deference problem, because they do not claim that democracy tracks any truth of the matter and demands of us to change

²⁴ While Habermas's and Cohen's accounts of justification are substantive, Pettit's is formal, as he takes justified outcomes to be ones that are consistent with the premises to which citizens have previously consented. To the extent that I employ justification in its very general meaning of conclusive reasons in favor, this distinction does not affect my argument.

our convictions according to its outcomes. However, if legitimacy of outcomes hinges on their being *correct*, there emerges the deference problem. When decisions are the product of actual democratic process and this is taken to produce only justified results, we not only ought to obey these decisions, but we also ought to take them as true. This means that we ought to acknowledge both justification and legitimacy of particular outcome and “surrender our moral judgment” to the superior epistemic capacity of democracy (Estlund 2008, 105).

The example Estlund offers for correctness theory is Rousseau's theory of the general will. Estlund reads Rousseau's general will as providing a procedure-independent criterion for the justification of democratic outcomes: “outcomes are legitimate when and because they are correct and not for any procedural reason” (Estlund 2008, 103). However, such reading simply collapses the distinction between the justification and the legitimacy of outcomes, while paying no heed to democratic procedure itself. In particular, it obliterates Rousseau's more complex account of the general will, as both procedural and substantive. If it is true that democratic decisions ought to be just, according to Rousseau, it is also true that they are not legitimate unless they are also the product of democratic process. In fact, neither correctly issued decisions that fail to respect the substantive criteria of the general will, i.e. Rousseau's famous ‘will of all’ (Rousseau 1763, 230), nor substantively correct decisions that fail to pass through people's “free votes” are legitimate (Rousseau 1763, 182). Hence, Rousseau's account of the justification of democracy can be thought of as both intrinsicist and outcome-based, because it requires democratic decisions to be the issue of a justified procedure *and* also as substantively correct, quite similarly to Pettit's (see Peter 2008, 72).

On the other hand, Estlund's own epistemic proceduralism takes democratic procedures to be justified insofar as they are generally acceptable to the qualified and produce ‘better-than-randomly’ justified or correct outcomes. If it is true that he does not make reference to the epistemic quality of each and every outcome, as Pettit and Rousseau do, it is also true that his account is not purely intrinsicist, for the epistemic capacity of democracy to produce better-than-random decisions matters to its justification. Thus, Estlund's account qualifies as dualistic, as it justifies democracy because of its intrinsic value, that is its qualified acceptability (Estlund 2008, 40-64), and because of its instrumental value in achieving on average correct results.

To conclude, it seems to me that the distinction proposed in this paper is not merely reconstructive, but fulfills a conceptually analytic role, as it helps to reformulate the opposition of instrumentalism and proceduralism while holding the focus over the justification of procedures. To be sure, it does not change the categorization of available accounts for the justification of democracy. Still, it offers four advantages.

First, it elucidates the difference, which is sometimes blurred, between the justification of particular outcomes and the justification of democracy. While the former is necessarily piecemeal if conducted irrespective of procedures that issued said outcomes, the latter is necessarily holistic, as it applies to the whole decision-making process. Moreover, even though instrumentalists still make reference to the quality of outcomes, they have to follow a similar scheme as the one of intrinsicalist accounts. Both of them take outcomes to be legitimate (although they can sometimes be unjustified) in virtue of democratic procedures that produce them. Where they differ is over the reasons to take these democratic procedures as justified and whether these hold contingently or necessarily.

Second, this paper means to reassess the goal that any justification of democratic procedures ought to set up for itself, by making reference to some independent, justifying criterion. Following Estlund, it is not neutrality over substantive values that qualifies democratic outcomes as legitimate. Rather, we ought to abide by these outcomes because there are conclusive reasons to take democracy itself as the decision-making process that realizes certain important values. The idea is that in case of conflict, these are to be preferred, *as long as actual democratic procedures really realize them*. While instrumentalism states that clearly, by justifying democracy only indirectly through the results it produces on average; intrinsicalism appears to focus only on procedures irrespective of the quality of outcomes. However, since democracy is intrinsically justified as long as it is necessary for the realization of a certain independent value, the possibility that some outcome of actual procedures is so contrary to that value to make it illegitimate is always open. In this way I read the constraints that are generally put over democracy not to undermine itself (e.g. Christiano 2008, Estlund 2008, Pettit 2012).

Third, I think that the distinction between the justification of outcomes and the justification of procedures also helps clarifying the relationship between legitimacy and justice. While some have taken

legitimacy to rely on justice (e.g. Christiano 2008), others have claimed that it is independent from justice (e.g. Pettit 2012). If we consider outcomes, certainly legitimacy does not hinge on their being right or just, as we have seen throughout this article. However, when procedures are at hand, justice might be a perfectly sound independent value through which to justify democracy. Thus, this analysis shows how democratic legitimacy has a complex relation to justice, which does not pertain to democratic decisions, but to the reasons that justify the democratic process.

Finally, once we shift the focus from outcomes to procedures, we see how Rousseau's problem of obeying political authority while "remaining free as before" has no proper solution (Estlund 2008, 111-112). If freedom amounts to a form of self-rule and requires us to do only what we see to be justified, the whole idea of political legitimacy seems problematic (Wolff 1970). To the extent that legitimacy tells us to do things we disagree with because of the way they have been decided, it inevitably conflicts with freedom as self-rule or autonomy²⁵. However, to the extent that a proper justification, either instrumentalist or intrinsicist, provides us with reasons to prefer the realization of its justifying value with respect to some wrongs democracy might produce, democratic decisions retain their legitimacy. In the end, it seems, it is up to each of us to strike the balance between democracy's capacity to realize a certain value, as political equality or epistemic quality, and its failures in such endeavor.

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²⁵ For an inquiry over the paradoxes of authority with respect to autonomy and rationality, see Shapiro 2012.

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EPISTEMIC FOUNDATIONS OF DEMOCRATIC AUTHORITY

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ABSTRACT

Until recently, epistemic considerations have not been relevant for answering the question about democratic authority. It was usually considered that justifications that go in the direction of knowledge, truth or correctness favored decision making by experts rather than democratic decision making. However, recent research in the field of epistemic democracy has experienced significant change of the point of view in this regard. Now it seems unavoidable that the question about justification of democracy and its authority should have an epistemic dimension. In this paper, special attention will be paid to justification of democratic authority on epistemic grounds. Since I think that in order to answer the question about legitimate democratic authority, it is necessary to previously examine what makes democratic decision making legitimate, I will also consider different ways of justifying democracy that include epistemic considerations. Since Estlund's defense of epistemic proceduralism plays a key role in grounding democratic authority on epistemic basis, in this paper I will in greater detail discuss some essential issues regarding this conception.

KEYWORDS

epistemic democracy; public reason; political obligation; democratic authority; public deliberation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Until recently, epistemic considerations have not been relevant for answering the question about democratic authority.¹ It was usually considered that justifications that go in the direction of knowledge, truth or correctness favored

¹ Earlier version of this paper was presented at the conference *Democracy, Identity, European Integration* held at the University of Rijeka, November 28-29, 2013. I am grateful to participants of the conference for very helpful discussions.

decision making by experts rather than democratic decision making. However, recent research in the field of epistemic democracy has experienced significant change of the point of view in this regard. Now it seems unavoidable that the question about justification of democracy and its authority should have an epistemic dimension. In this paper, special attention will be paid to justification of democratic authority on epistemic grounds. Since I think that in order to answer the question about legitimate democratic authority, it is necessary to previously examine what makes democratic decision making legitimate, I will also consider different ways of justifying democracy that include epistemic considerations. Since Estlund's defense of epistemic proceduralism plays a key role in grounding democratic authority on epistemic basis, in this paper I will in greater detail discuss some essential issues regarding this conception.

In the second section of the paper, I introduce some basic notions and explain the two-step justification of political authority that is based on public reason. I also point at the connection between justifications based on public reason with considerations which pertain to epistemic democracy. In the third section I examine Estlund's epistemic conception of democratic authority. Special attention is devoted to Estlund's arguments in favor of epistemic proceduralism which, in his opinion, should be given precedence over other epistemic and non-epistemic conceptions of democratic authority. In the fourth section of the paper, previous considerations are brought into connection with the topic of constituting democracy. I argue that epistemic considerations are of essential significance for this topic, but also that full justification of democratic authority should rest on a balance between epistemic and non-epistemic considerations. Section five concludes.

2. PUBLIC REASON AND DEMOCRATIC AUTHORITY

Epistemic considerations regarding democracy can have different functions. They can help us answer the question what makes democratic decision making legitimate, but their function can also be to offer an answer to the question about legitimate democratic authority. Despite the fact that the notion of legitimacy figures in both cases, we think a clear distinction should be drawn between

legitimacy of democratic decision making and legitimate political authority.² Namely, it is obvious that a decision can be legitimate due to the fact that it had been brought in a democratic way, but it does not ensue that it necessarily generates political obligation. The typical examples regarding limits of political obligation are decisions suspending fundamental rights and freedoms or democracy itself.³ In other words, for legitimacy of democratic authority it is not sufficient that a procedure of democratic decision making be legitimate; it is also necessary to take into account some procedure-independent standards.

In that sense, similar problems emerge within epistemic democracy as when we generally make an attempt to justify democracy and its authority. The crucial issue when trying to justify democracy is whether precedence should be given to procedure of democratic decision making or outcomes which ensue from such a procedure. Obviously, what distinguishes democracy from all other mechanisms of political decision making is fairness of procedures, which guarantees to all participants free and equal access in the making of decisions. However, if merely fairness of procedures constitutes grounds for justification of democracy, then it has to be admitted that it is grounded on very weak foundations. By means of fair procedures it is possible to make decisions that would be deeply unfair, bringing into question the idea about purely procedural justification of democracy.

An alternative conception of instrumental justification of democracy is based on the idea that democracy is justified to the extent that it protects or advances procedure-independent standards. To the extent to which outcomes of procedure are such that they contribute to preservation or advancement of independent standards, to that extent is democracy itself justified. Nevertheless, it seems that instrumental justification of democracy is also grounded on weak foundations. Namely, the main problem concerning instrumental justification of democracy is that if outcomes of undemocratic type of decision making can better fulfill procedure-independent standards, then such decision making should be given precedence over democracy. Of course, it is possible to look for a solution that would be a hybrid conception of justification, combining both procedural and instrumental considerations.

In this paper, I will examine answers to questions about grounds of democratic legitimacy and democratic authority from the perspective of epistemic democracy. Within epistemic democracy, at the most general level, we can differentiate among

² See also A. Buchanan, "Political Legitimacy and Democracy," *Ethics* 112, 2002, pp. 689–695.

³ See R. A. Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1989, pp. 171–172.

three points of view which correspond to previously discussed theoretical positions. Namely, when legitimacy of democratic decision making is concerned, it can be claimed that it is grounded in some epistemic characteristics of fair democratic procedures. Alternatively, it can be claimed that legitimacy is grounded in some procedure-independent standards of correctness and that procedures of democratic decision making are justified to the extent to which their outcomes contribute to realization of these standards. Finally, it is possible to defend a hybrid epistemic conception of democratic legitimacy that underlines the importance of both fair democratic procedures and independent standards of correctness. When democratic authority is concerned, the issue which has drawn considerable attention within epistemic democracy is whether its justification should give precedence to a hybrid conception or to purely instrumental justification.⁴ However, at this point it is similarly impossible to avoid juxtaposing hybrid conception of justification with proceduralist view which considers fairness of decision making procedures to be the source of political obligation.

Standard justification of political authority, typical of social contract theory, even though it has been partially derived from the idea of majority rule, has not been directly derived from democratic decision making. Within classical social contract theory, consent is the direct source of political obligation. The majority rule generates political obligation only indirectly, because previously consent has to be secured regarding such way of decision making. It is important to emphasize that for classical social contract theorists, consent regarding majority rule does not mean that society constituted in this way will necessarily be democratic. On the contrary, these theoreticians maintained that any type of government can be established by means of majority rule. So, original consent regarding majority rule and subsequent majority voting generate political obligation regardless of the form of government. Therefore it could be said that subject of original consent is method of decision making, which usually is democratic, but that subsequent consent of the majority does not necessarily result in establishing democracy. Undemocratic forms of government can be chosen in a democratic way.

This possibility is blocked in recent views that primarily ground the source of political obligation in public reason. The justification of political authority based on public reason does not necessarily include consent of all members of society. Instead, a conception of justice or political decision making is sought that would be acceptable to all reasonable citizens. The idea of reasonable citizen can be

⁴ D. M. Estlund, *Democratic Authority: A Philosophical Framework*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2008, pp. 102–106.

explained in different ways. For example, Rawls brings this idea into direct connection with idea of reciprocity i.e. aspiration to offer to others fair conditions of cooperation which they would be willing to accept.⁵ Any sort of imposition of conceptions of justice or political decision making which other citizens would not be prepared to approve of is excluded in advance. It means that justification of political authority grounded in public reason excludes undemocratic forms of political decision making. Therefore the choice given to reasonable citizens does not pertain to various forms of government, but to the form of democratic decision making that would be acceptable to all reasonable citizens.

The justification of political authority grounded on public reason, similarly to standard justification of political authority, requires two steps. In the first step, reasonable citizens decide which forms of political decision making can be reasonably rejected, which eliminates familiar methods of undemocratic decision making. In the second step, normatively the most adequate procedure of democratic decision making is sought. The delineations of the second step often involve theoretical considerations that are not complete. They usually anticipate which procedure of democratic decision making would be the most acceptable on reasonable grounds, comparing typical procedures of democratic decision making such as voting and public deliberation. Of course, comparative advantage of a procedure of decision making based on a combination of voting and public deliberation is also explored. In addition, the usual forms of democratic decision making are often compared with lottery, whether as a sole method of political decision making or in combination with some other method.

It is obvious that considerations favoring certain democratic procedures can be based on different principles. David Estlund espouses the view that epistemic democracy is significant precisely because such considerations ought to be almost exclusively of epistemic nature.⁶ Actually, significance of epistemic considerations is twofold because it extends to both steps of justification of political authority grounded in public reason. It is well-known that Rawls has maintained that conception of public reason must be freed from epistemological dimension.⁷ Namely, insisting on the truth of their own comprehensive views, reasonable

⁵ J. Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," in: John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, Expanded Edition, Columbia University Press, New York, 2005, p. 446.

⁶ For criticism of this view, see E. Anderson, "An Epistemic Defense of Democracy: David Estlund's *Democratic Authority*," *Episteme* 5 (1), 2008, pp. 135–136.

⁷ See J. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, Expanded Edition, Columbia University Press, New York, 2005.

citizens could hardly achieve any consent. Epistemic abstinence is precisely what leads towards the possibility of achieving an overlapping consensus. In contrast, Estlund thinks that if the acceptability requirement is to be valid, it “must be put forward as true.”⁸ This is the first way how epistemic considerations come into play when justifying political authority grounded in public reason.

The second way how they come into play is when weighing comparative advantages of various procedures of democratic decision making. It is important to notice that such a conception of political authority grounded in public reason, unlike standard justification of political authority, does not rest only on consent about the method of decision making, but on defining the most adequate form of political decision making for generating political obligation. Various forms of democratic decision making can be more or less adequate in this regard. If some decision making procedures have a tendency to lead to correct outcomes, then epistemic considerations regarding democracy become necessary. Therefore it becomes an important task to establish not only which procedure of democratic decision making would be acceptable on reasonable grounds, but also which epistemic characteristics of various procedures of democratic decision making make them more or less acceptable sources of political obligation. It is precisely for this reason that epistemic democracy is centrally important for answering the question about legitimate political authority.

3. ESTLUND'S CONCEPTION OF DEMOCRATIC AUTHORITY

David Estlund differentiates between three conceptions of legitimacy of democratic decision making. He terms them impartial proceduralism, correctness theories and epistemic proceduralism.⁹ In his view, the first conception of legitimacy of democracy is non-epistemic, while other two are epistemic. Theories which belong to the conception of impartial proceduralism are characterized by the view that for legitimacy of democratic decision making, it is not necessary to adduce a procedure-independent standard. Legitimacy of outcomes of democratic decision making fully depends of fair procedures. On the other hand, for epistemic

⁸ D. M. Estlund, *Democratic Authority: A Philosophical Framework*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2008, p. 58. See also D. Estlund, “The Truth in Political Liberalism,” in: Jeremy Elkins and Andrew Norris (eds.), *Truth and Democracy*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, PA, 2012, pp. 251–271.

⁹ D. Estlund, “Beyond Fairness and Deliberation: The Epistemic Dimension of Democratic Authority,” in: James Bohman and William Rehg (eds.), *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Ma and London, 1997, p. 182.

conceptions of democratic legitimacy it is typical that they emphasize procedure-independent standards which primarily have an epistemic importance. In other words, to be able to know whether some decisions are better or worse, it is necessary to have a procedure-independent standard of correctness.

The essence of epistemic conceptions of legitimacy of democratic decision making, according to Estlund, is that for justification of democracy they largely attribute importance to the quality of its outcomes. The difference between correctness theories and epistemic proceduralism is that former are purely instrumental, while latter in addition to quality of outcomes of decision making, also emphasize the role of fair procedures. In contrast to correctness theories, epistemic proceduralism does not maintain that legitimacy of democratic decision making requires that outcomes necessarily be correct. It is only important that procedure of decision making be such that it has a tendency that better decisions can be made in terms of a procedure-independent criterion of correctness. Obviously, epistemic proceduralism is hybrid conception of legitimacy of democratic decision making which stresses importance of both fair procedures and procedure-independent standards of correctness.

Estlund maintains that the conception of epistemic proceduralism has an advantage over other epistemic and non-epistemic conceptions of legitimacy of democratic decision making. A comparison of impartial proceduralism with correctness theories leads to a conclusion that the former should be given precedence. Namely, if it is surmised that decisions are brought by voting on the basis of a majority rule, in the case of disagreement, at least the majority will regard the decision correct, but the minority of citizens may regard the decision as incorrect. This brings into question the basic postulate of correctness theories, namely that correctness of outcomes is a necessary and sufficient condition for legitimacy of democratic decision making. So, impartial proceduralism has an advantage as a conception of legitimate democratic decision making because in situations of disagreement it enables bringing of decisions in a fair manner, which makes them acceptable because of that even to those who do not agree with their outcomes. Consequently, impartial proceduralism as a conception of legitimacy of democratic decision making should be given precedence over correctness theories.

The main reason why epistemic proceduralism should be given precedence over impartial proceduralism is that the latter conception leads to „political nihilism.“¹⁰ The price which impartial proceduralism has to pay for giving up on procedure-

¹⁰ D. M. Estlund, *Democratic Authority: A Philosophical Framework*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2008, p. 26.

independent standards and primarily epistemic standards of correctness is that multitude of bad decisions can be justified on the basis of fairness of procedures. Impartial proceduralism, strictly speaking, does not have a way to differentiate between better and worse decisions. Robert Dahl says that „the democratic process is a gamble on the possibilities that a people, in acting autonomously, will learn how to act rightly.“¹¹ But this gamble can turn out to have been wrong. Given that epistemic proceduralism takes into account procedure-independent standards of correctness, it has an advantage over impartial proceduralism because it makes a clear distinction between better and worse decisions. In other words, precedence should be given to those procedures of democratic decision making that have a tendency to lead to better decisions. Therefore, epistemic proceduralism as a conception of legitimacy of democratic decision making should be given precedence over impartial proceduralism.

Even though Estlund does not directly compare epistemic conceptions in terms of legitimacy of democratic decision making, it can be said that criterion of transitivity requires that we give precedence to epistemic proceduralism over correctness theories. However, even though Estlund does not directly consider the relationship between these two conceptions of legitimacy of democratic decision making, juxtaposing these conceptions has a decisive importance for justification of democratic authority. It should be noticed that Estlund does not make a clear distinction between the two aforementioned dimensions of justification.¹² Nevertheless, taking into account the considerations from the previous section, I maintain that it is justified to make such a distinction. In view of this distinction, I think that Estlund's criticism of impartial proceduralism is largely relevant for the issue of legitimacy of democratic decision making and his criticism of correctness theories is largely relevant for justification of democratic authority. Making these distinctions, I do not strive to construe Estlund's view so much as to pursue the way in which he argues against aforementioned conceptions.

Before examining Estlund's criticism of impartial proceduralism as a conception of legitimacy of democratic decision making, I point out that his theory is one of the most important contributions to justification of political authority on the grounds of public reason. Namely, in accordance with justification of political authority on the basis of public reason, Estlund clearly

¹¹ R. A. Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1989, p. 192.

¹² See also H. S. Richardson, „Estlund's Promising Account of Democratic Authority,” *Ethics* 121, 2011, p. 303.

emphasizes that in the first step, from the perspective of reasonable citizens or what he terms qualified points of view, a model of social choice that favors minority of experts would be rejected. In his words, the key question in this perspective is „You might be correct, but what makes you boss?“¹³ Therefore, Estlund maintains that despite the fact that relying on experts could be the best strategy in epistemic regard, the model of the rule by experts or epistocracy would not pass the test of public reason based on the acceptability requirement which includes all qualified points of view. Considering that the most famous non-democratic way of justifying political authority has been excluded on the grounds of public reason, in the second step relative advantages and disadvantages of various forms of exclusively democratic decision making are examined.

We can now go back to Estlund's criticism of impartial proceduralism as a conception of legitimacy of democratic decision making. Regarding this criticism, two things should be pointed out. Firstly, in accordance with limitations of public reason, only procedures of democratic decision making are taken into account, primarily voting on the basis of majority rule and public deliberation, as well as a combination of these procedures. Estlund also takes into account lottery and a combination of this method of decision making with voting and public deliberation, but in terms of criticism of aforementioned mechanisms of decision making rather than in terms of independent consideration of its advantages and disadvantages. Secondly, Estlund does not approach juxtaposition of comparative advantages and disadvantages of these procedures of democratic decision making directly, but by considering broader theoretical conceptions.

Since I have already designated impartial proceduralism as a conception of legitimacy of democratic decision making, within this conception Estlund differentiates three further theoretical sub-conceptions which highlight different procedures of democratic decision making. The three sub-conceptions of impartial proceduralism which Estlund elucidates are fair proceduralism, fair deliberative proceduralism and rational deliberative proceduralism.¹⁴ The common trait of all these sub-conceptions is that they assume that for legitimacy of democratic decision-making it is not necessary to adduce any procedure-independent

¹³ D. M. Estlund, *Democratic Authority: A Philosophical Framework*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2008, p. 3.

¹⁴ D. Estlund, „Beyond Fairness and Deliberation: The Epistemic Dimension of Democratic Authority,“ in: James Bohman and William Rehg (eds.), *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Ma and London, 1997, pp. 176–181.

standard. What differentiates them is that fair proceduralism is based on the majority rule and fair deliberative proceduralism and rational deliberative proceduralism on the procedure of public deliberation or a combination of this procedure with voting. Estlund subjects all these three sub-conceptions of impartial proceduralism to criticism.

Firstly, he thinks that fair proceduralism is not able to show why voting in accordance with majority rule is a better method of decision making than a random device of flipping a coin. Both are fair procedures and if procedural fairness is the only thing that counts, there is no difference whatsoever between these procedures. However, people would hardly accept that some issues such as those of distributive justice should be decided by tossing a coin. Therefore, if voting is considered more acceptable in that sense, it cannot be only because of its intrinsic fairness. The another problem for fair proceduralism is that within this sub-conception there is no way in which we can recognize better reasons. Just like procedural fairness demands that each vote be counted equally, all reasons would likewise have to be given an equal treatment. It means that fair proceduralism would have to treat good and bad reasons equally, which is unacceptable from epistemic point of view.

Secondly, Estlund claims that fair deliberative proceduralism can be criticized in a similar way. The crucial difference in relation to fair proceduralism is that within this sub-conception, essential importance of public deliberation is emphasized. However, Estlund maintains that without a procedure-independent criterion, fair deliberative proceduralism is not able to show what is gained in terms of legitimacy in the process of a fair public deliberation. For the sake of the argument, Estlund proceeds from the procedure of democratic decision making which consists of public deliberation and voting. The basic advantage of this procedure, according to fair deliberative proceduralism, is that legitimacy of outcomes is product of fairness of procedure itself. However, Estlund's next step in the argument is to assume an alternative procedure of democratic decision making which instead of voting has post-deliberative flipping a coin after the process of public deliberation. Estlund suggests that the requirement of procedural fairness could be to take into account all options that have gained some measure of support in the process of public deliberation and decide between them employing a random device of tossing a coin. To claim that there are greater chances that post-deliberative voting should lead to better outcomes than post-deliberative tossing of a coin, it requires adducing a procedure-independent criterion of correctness. Given that fair deliberative proceduralism does not allow for the role

of an independent criterion, it means that in terms of democratic legitimacy there is no difference between post-deliberative voting and flipping a coin. In order to make such a difference, it is necessary to introduce an additional criterion which has an epistemic significance.

Finally, Estlund criticizes the sub-conception he terms rational deliberative proceduralism. The characteristic which this sub-conception has in common with the previous one is that it requires some sort of deliberative democracy, or rather procedure of public deliberation, whether taken independently or in combination with voting. What differentiates rational deliberative proceduralism from fair deliberative proceduralism is that in addition to fair access to public discussion and the entire decision making process, this sub-conception also emphasizes the importance of recognizing good reasons. What Estlund finds problematic regarding this position is that it assumes that the basis of legitimacy of reason-recognizing procedures does not necessitate an independent standard of correctness. But rational deliberative proceduralism is shown to be an unstable position in this regard, because recognition of good reasons requires an independent criterion of correctness. Therefore rational deliberative proceduralism either wrongly assumes that procedure for recognizing reasons can work without independent standards or once it is corrected in terms of a standard of correctness, it ceases to be a non-epistemic type of proceduralism and becomes an epistemic conception of democratic legitimacy. If this is accepted, epistemic proceduralism which acknowledges both importance of fair procedures and independent standards of correctness becomes a conception of legitimacy that should be given precedence over any sub-conception of impartial proceduralism. For that reason Estlund concludes that, “without any space for the view that democratic outcomes are procedurally, but not substantively, rational, deliberative conceptions of democracy are forced to ground democratic legitimacy either in the infertile soil of an impartial proceduralism or in a rich but combustible appeal to the epistemic value of democratic procedures.”¹⁵

I now turn to Estlund's criticism of correctness theories. I have previously noted that Estlund criticizes impartial proceduralism as a conception of legitimacy of democratic decision making. As opposed to that, his criticism of correctness theories focuses on their inadequacy as conceptions of legitimate democratic authority. Estlund does not find problematic the view that correctness of outcomes should be the basis for binding democratic decision making. What he finds

¹⁵ D. M. Estlund, *Democratic Authority: A Philosophical Framework*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2008, p. 102.

problematic in correctness theories is that citizens who do not agree with the outcome necessarily have to consider their judgment wrong. The problem is therefore that correctness theories view the outcome of democratic decision making as necessarily correct in the moral sense, which generates moral obligation of someone's consent with the given decision, even when his or her judgment is opposed to that. Estlund argues that the conception of epistemic proceduralism provides better grounding for legitimacy of political authority. Namely, epistemic proceduralism does not assume that the decision necessarily has to be correct. Even wrong decisions can have binding force because they have been brought on the basis of procedures that have a tendency to produce correct decisions (Estlund in this regard points to analogy between democracy and a jury). But precisely because decision making procedures are the source of the binding force, rather than correctness of outcomes, it is possible for citizens to consider some decisions binding due to procedural reasons and to regard them as wrong at the same time. This means that they do not have to subject their judgment to democratic decision making. Estlund summarizes his criticism of correctness theories in the following way:

Here we can see the promise of an epistemic form of proceduralism, one that departs from correctness theories by holding that the outcome is legitimate even when it is incorrect, owing to the epistemic value, albeit imperfect of the democratic procedure. Such an account would not expect minority voter to surrender her judgment to the procedure in any way, since she can hold both that the process was properly carried out and that the outcome, while morally binding on citizens for procedural reasons, is morally mistaken.¹⁶

However, Estlund's criticism of correctness theories brings us again to impartial proceduralism. Namely, if the source of political obligation is procedure of democratic decision making, then question is posed whether in terms of legitimate democratic authority epistemic proceduralism, like impartial proceduralism, perceives fairness of procedures as the only source of political obligation (if rational deliberative proceduralism is excluded, which we will discuss momentarily). In order to show why this is not the case, Estlund points out that impartial proceduralism is devised as a conception of fair decision making in situations in which it is interests of various persons that are primarily taken into account. However, if we assume that an outcome of democratic decision making can be better or worse in a moral sense, Estlund thinks that fair way of taking into account interests of all citizens is not sufficient to generate political obligation or at least assumes exceptionally weak foundation for political obligation. In this case it

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

is necessary that the procedure of democratic decision making finds a way to take into account moral judgments of individuals. Given that epistemic proceduralism allows for such a possibility, Estlund claims that epistemic proceduralism is modification of impartial proceduralism „to cases of morally evaluable outcomes.“¹⁷ Unlike impartial proceduralism, epistemic proceduralism is sensitive to outcomes that may be better or worse in moral sense. Unlike correctness theories, epistemic proceduralism does not require full convergence regarding moral correctness of outcomes of democratic procedures. Now we are in a position to see why Estlund thinks that epistemic proceduralism offers a better foundation for moral obligation to accept outcomes of democratic decision making than alternative conceptions of legitimate democratic authority.

4. LESSONS FOR CONSTITUTING DEMOCRACY

After we have considered Estlund's view, we can go back to justification of political authority based on public reason. Recall that we have claimed that this type of justification proceeds in two steps. In the first step, reasonable citizens reject those types of decision making that are not adequate for justifying political authority, and in the second step they decide which way of democratic decision making is the most adequate in this regard. Estlund's view has been given special attention because it is the most important contribution to such two-step justification of political authority on the basis of public reason. When the first step is concerned, Estlund suggests that from the perspective of all qualified points of view, epistocracy would be reasonably rejected as a method of political decision making. Since it does not pass the test of the acceptability requirement, epistocracy cannot be a source of legitimate political authority. This leaves us with familiar forms of democratic decision making. The crucial contribution of epistemic democracy approach is ascertaining which method of democratic decision making would be the most adequate for generating political obligation. Even though Estlund's consideration in this regard is directed towards various conceptions and sub-conceptions of democratic legitimacy and legitimate democratic authority rather than epistemic qualities of certain procedures of democratic decision making, I think that it goes in the direction of accepting some form of deliberative democracy.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

I will now attempt to make explicit this conclusion, that is implicit in Estlund's considerations. In this respect, my criticism of Estlund's view is quite modest because it does not concern the conclusion, but the way in which it has been reached. Namely, as we have seen, when speaking about legitimacy of democratic decision making in terms of proceduralism, Estlund differentiates conceptions of impartial proceduralism and epistemic proceduralism. Within impartial proceduralism, one of sub-conceptions is rational deliberative proceduralism. However, if rational deliberative proceduralism is corrected for an independent standard of correctness, the way Estlund does, the conception of epistemic proceduralism actually reduces to rational deliberative proceduralism. It can be claimed that this objection is purely terminological, because it is all the same whether epistemic proceduralism is reduced to rational deliberative proceduralism or vice versa. However, it is conspicuous that unlike consideration of other epistemic and non-epistemic conceptions and sub-conceptions of legitimacy of democratic decision making, Estlund does not explicitly state which form of decision making is required by epistemic proceduralism.¹⁸ Once when epistemic proceduralism is reduced to rational deliberative proceduralism corrected for independent epistemic standard of correctness, the priority of public deliberation becomes explicit. In order to preserve a brand of "epistemic proceduralism", it could alternatively be claimed that rational deliberative proceduralism is actually a sub-conception of epistemic proceduralism, which is still in accordance with previously established conclusion. Something similar can be claimed regarding legitimate democratic authority. We have seen that Estlund in that regard also differentiates between conceptions of impartial proceduralism and epistemic proceduralism. We have already stressed that rational deliberative proceduralism should be excluded from Estlund's criticism of impartial proceduralism at least when it is corrected for an independent standard of correctness. Actually, such type of rational deliberative proceduralism requires a form of deliberative democracy as the most adequate procedure of decision making for generating political obligation on epistemic grounds.

It can be noticed that nothing in previous discussion suggests that considerations regarding the most adequate procedure of democratic decision making for generating political obligation must be of strictly epistemic nature.

¹⁸ That some form of deliberative democracy is required becomes obvious in chapter IX of Estlund's *Democratic Authority*, where he compares the ideal epistemic deliberation with the model epistemic deliberation. See D. M. Estlund, *Democratic Authority: A Philosophical Framework*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2008, Chapter IX.

Despite persuasiveness of the epistemic democracy approach, it is natural to assume that constituting democracy on the grounds of public reason should, in addition to epistemic, also include other considerations that take into account familiar principles such as freedom and equality. The epistemic democracy approach is centrally important because it points to significance of epistemic considerations for justification of democracy and its authority. However, full justification of the most adequate procedure of democratic decision making for generating political obligation should also include non-epistemic considerations. I think that it should actually reflect a balance of epistemic and non-epistemic considerations. Even though epistemic democracy might not be sufficient for full justification, it is certainly one of the most important missing links in that endeavor.

5. CONCLUSION

In this paper I have proceeded from the two-step justification of political authority on the grounds of public reason. The first step in justification leads to reasonable rejection of non-democratic methods of decision making, while the second step searches for the most adequate procedure of democratic decision making for generating political obligation. I have concluded that considerations based on public reason require some form of deliberative democracy. In this paper epistemic premises have been particularly examined in order to establish this conclusion. In that regard, I have considered Estlund's version of epistemic democracy and his criticism of conceptions which he terms impartial proceduralism and correctness theories. I have concurred with Estlund that the conception of epistemic proceduralism should be given precedence over alternative conceptions, but I have also pointed out that his defense of epistemic proceduralism requires some form of deliberative democracy.

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BELIEF-REVISION, EPISTEMIC CONTRIBUTION, AND POLYNORMATIVITY

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ABSTRACT

Given the limited inferential capacity of any human epistemic agent, the best social epistemic system includes as many human epistemic agents as possible and has them “working under” diverse epistemic norms. In this text, this claim is argued for through presenting a pragmatist and instrumentalist argument for Epistemic Contribution and, consequently, the diversity of epistemic norms (polynormativity). Through universal inclusion and polynormativity we raise our chances of the revision of false belief. Furthermore, showing how neither Dewey’s democracy nor Hayek’s markets can by themselves sustain not slipping into epistemically distortive social arrangements, I argue, along Mill, that there should be an institutional order that primarily maintains universal inclusion and polynormativity. Certain tentative requirements of this institutional order are discussed.

KEYWORDS

Epistemic contribution, pluralism, epistemic diversity, normative diversity, institutional order

1. INTRODUCTION

We should organize society as to raise our chances of revision of false beliefs. I argue that in order to do this, at least two “mechanisms” are required at the outset – universal inclusion and the maintenance of normative diversity. This is because given the limited inferential capacities of any human epistemic agent (and, arguably, any epistemic agent), the best social epistemic order, even by standards of a self-interested agent or an epistemocrat, would include as many epistemic agents as possible and, at

that, have them “working under” diverse epistemic norms. Our institutional order, furthermore, should reflect this.

The case for this social epistemic order need not be grounded in *any* controversial theory of truth, but merely by the notion that any truth will be inferred, and thus a result of a revision of a false belief (later in the text, *belief-revision*). The epistemic value derived from the epistemic cooperation under conditions of necessarily limited inferential capacities of any epistemic agent is *minimally* the one of movement *away from* false beliefs, and thus of recognizing and revising false beliefs. Epistemic cooperation is here understood as a fact of social life – we are engaged in it in any political or social arrangement, and the question is how to make it better. This article is an effort at devising a case for epistemic cooperation upgraded through universal inclusion and nurturing of the epistemic diversity, where epistemic diversity includes cognitive diversity, roughly put a biological difference among inferers, and normative diversity, roughly put a difference among epistemic norms of different communities, and I will in this text focus more prominently on the normative diversity.

In this text’s specific line of argumentation, I will approach the question of universal inclusion from the perspective of Fricker’s Epistemic Contribution, and attempt to give an instrumentalist argument for it, using (as far as I can tell) the least controversial version of pragmatist epistemology. If this argument is correct, I will attempt to show, it implies accelerating and harvesting normative diversity, and thus it implies an institutional order of polynormativity.

The plan of the text is as follows.

I will first sketch out the state of the debate concerning epistemic diversity and universal inclusion by commenting on Mill’s, Hayek’s and Dewey’s accounts. I believe all three are aware of the instrumental epistemic value of both epistemic diversity and inclusive social arrangements. However, Hayek and Dewey focus exclusively on certain institutional orders insufficient to stave off threats to the maintenance of epistemic diversity. Mill, on the other hand, focuses on the political argument for the institutional order that would maintain epistemic diversity.

I then attempt to present the epistemological argument for epistemic, and normative, diversity and universal inclusion. It is a reworking of Mill’s, Hayek’s and Dewey’s, augmented with least controversial form of pragmatist epistemology. It hinges on the concept of *belief-revision*. I present the argument in the condensed form, comment on it, and then present a somewhat looser reconstruction, in order to make explicit certain descriptive-epistemological commitments.

The final part of the text tries to give a rough sketch of just a few tentative requirements (and themes worthy of research) for the institutional order that would maintain normative diversity and universal inclusion.

2. INSTRUMENTAL VALUE OF EPISTEMIC DIVERSITY AND UNIVERSAL INCLUSION: A HISTORY

The following text will claim that Epistemic Contribution (EC) is epistemically beneficial from system-level point of view, and that this is so because universal inclusion entails development of epistemic, and more specifically *normative*, diversity in the system. Normative diversity is the carrier of epistemically valuable rise in chance of revision of false belief, and Epistemic Contribution is the carrier of normative diversity.

Landemore argues a similar point with regards to “democratic reason” and *cognitive* diversity (Landemore 2012a, Landemore 2012b). Cognitive diversity entails universal inclusion, because an increase in number necessarily increases cognitive diversity. Cognitive diversity entails *different* minds interpreting (inferring) norms. The difference here is that I argue that epistemic benefit increases even more with different minds interpreting *different* norms, and thus for normative diversity on top of cognitive diversity. Also, I would like to argue that this is beneficial to our comprehensive social epistemic cooperation, which entails democratic practices but is not reducible to them.

Epistemic Contribution is introduced as a concept in Fricker’s text “Epistemic Contribution as a Central Human Capability”, where she argues for Epistemic Contribution as “the exercise of (...) social epistemic capability on the part of the individual to *contribute to the pool of shared epistemic materials* – materials for knowledge, understanding, and very often for practical deliberation” (Fricker 2015, p. 76). As the title suggests, she proposes adding EC to the list of “‘central human functional capabilities’ – the capability set presented as necessary for human flourishing and on that ground definitive of an international standard for justice” (Fricker 2015, p. 74). The discussion of capabilities, and of Capabilities Approach, is beyond the scope of this text. Likewise, for purposes of this text I will mostly not comment directly on Fricker’s sophisticated and masterful text. I will focus exclusively on developing the argument from instrumentality for EC.

In discussing, among others, a Millian defense of Epistemic Contribution, Fricker touches upon its instrumental value. Since only free speech allows for the correct *reasons* for believing *x* to emerge, knowledge is attainable only through exercise of free speech, and therefore “wherever there is a significant failure of Epistemic Contribution, the very point of free speech (*to produce knowledge in the social body*) is compromised” (Fricker 2015, p. 84, my italics). Knowledge is thus conceived as a

result of the free competition of reasons and beliefs that requires as many minds to question and nominate those reasons and beliefs – a consequence, therefore, of *cooperation of many minds*. Mill writes that “(c)complete liberty of contradicting and disproving our opinion is the very condition which justifies us in assuming its truth for purposes of action; and on no other terms can a being with human faculties have any rational assurance of being right” (Mill 2003, p. 102).

In his text “Liberalism and Epistemic Diversity: Mill’s Skeptical Legacy” (Kelly 2006), Kelly pits Millian defense of epistemic diversity against Hayek’s and Dewey’s conceptions of human social epistemic systems, both of which are sensitive to the epistemic benefits of epistemic diversity, but present certain failings in incorporating the primacy of diversity in their institutional order.

The aspects of Kelly’s account particularly relevant for our present discussion could be presented as follows. Mill argues for *maintenance* of epistemic diversity. Both democracy and markets are of great utility for harvesting the knowledge dispersed through the population; however, neither democracy nor markets are sufficiently resistant *by themselves* to being monopolized or hijacked by powerful and malign groups. Thus, neither of them could be trusted to maintain epistemic diversity – there has to be an institutional order that utilized the social and epistemic benefits of both democracy and markets, but which was in the same time built to protect and maintain the epistemic diversity. Mill’s reasons for this are political – epistemic diversity “is not merely (...) a good that contributes to the criticisms and growth of knowledge, rather it is offered as part of the defense against tendencies to social and political conformity” (Kelly 2006, p. 255).

Hayek’s understanding of markets as epistemic mechanisms for managing the knowledge dispersed through the society which no single mind can gather or process disregards the distinct possibility that markets could erase diversity, and thus undermine its fundamental *epistemic* value. The resulting monopolies, beside being politically unjustified, are epistemically distortive¹. Markets could destroy the epistemological function of the market. Kelly notes, interestingly, that this is the result of Hayek’s mono-institutionalism, and that since Mill “attaches no special

¹ Now, there is more to be said about Hayek’s sophisticated understanding of the epistemic life of the society, and while his perscriptive anti-statism was retained throughout his life, I believe that the later Hayek, a relevant philosopher of normative systems, has a lot to teach us with regards to the descriptive philosophy of society that I find very useful in thinking about social epistemic systems. Numerous understandings in this text are derived from later Hayek’s insights and developments in philosophy they relevantly contributed to. While reading his original works is surely in order (see Hayek’s “The Use of Knowledge in Society” [Hayek 1945] for the succinct presentation of the theory of market as an epistemic mechanism, and *Law, Legislation and Liberty* [Hayek 1982] for the standard account of normative social life), for the excellent overview of the development of his *philosophical* work on social order see Fleetwood’s *Hayek’s Political Economy: The socio-economics of order* (Fleetwood 1995).

epistemological authority to any institution” (Kelly 2006, p. 260), he had no problem in conceiving of any of them being distortive.

Dewey, on the other hand, found democracy to be institution that harvested diversity in the most desirable way. Universal inclusion in the social experiment of democracy was an epistemological requirement for Dewey, who conceived of inclusive public deliberation as a process of discovery of possible solutions, and of exclusion as akin to “the falsification of evidence in natural science” (Kelly 2006, p. 261). Hilary Putnam writes: “The need for such fundamental democratic institutions as freedom of thought and speech follows, for Dewey, from requirements of scientific procedure in general: the unimpeded flow of information and the freedom to offer and to criticize hypotheses” (Putnam 1992, p. 188).

Dewey is, however, concerned with maintenance of open and inclusive deliberation. He redirects part of the weight of protecting it into private ethos of citizens (where distorting the freedom of communication in daily life through abuse, fear, hatred or suspicion is “treason to the democratic way of life” [Dewey 1981, p. 227.]), but concedes that there is a need for political control over associations that threaten this openness and inclusion (which include market results and particularly influential private media). Democracy, understood by Dewey as a system of social inquiry, and therefore an epistemologically superior system of governance, had to be protected from anti-democratic tendencies if it were not to become distortive. Maintaining epistemic diversity is a pre-requisite for democratic politics.

Dewey’s and Hayek’s account could complement each other. There is certainly more to their theories and writings than I have sketched out here for the specific purposes of this text. Taken as presented here, however, the first thing to notice is that they are after a somewhat different kind of epistemic good in the society (very roughly put, Hayek is after economic, and Dewey is after political epistemic good), and the account of each seems to disregard the other’s good. But, more to the point, both of these epistemic goods cannot be protected by their respective institutions alone. Democracy, in its non-qualified version, could be overtaken by a tyrannical majority; market, in its non-qualified version, could lead to an illegitimate distribution of power. Both as such are epistemically distortive. Kelly’s Mill finds the maintenance of epistemic diversity to be the primary governing principle which would lead to an institutional order of epistemic cooperation (which would include both democracy and markets in their qualified version) that would be least epistemically distortive.

I believe all three accounts to be contributive to the debate, and I believe Mill’s to be most correct in certain aspects. However, I would like to present an *epistemological*, and not political, argument for maintenance of epistemic, and normative, diversity through maintenance of universal inclusion which builds on Mill’s initial argument and augments it with explicit pragmatist epistemology.

What Mill, Dewey and Hayek, as well as many others, recognize is the fundamental function that error plays in a social epistemic system. To recognize error, to be able to perceive evidence-as-evidence, is to be able to infer. Without an environmental resistance to a prediction, no mind would be possible. If this mind wouldn't have been able to somehow adjust in face of at least some environmental resistance, it would not be a mind. Many minds, however, make many predictions – and thus encounter many adjustments. These adjustments are to a serious level a result of learning. The varieties of learning among varieties of minds means increasing the pool of available adjustments. Increasing the pool of available adjustments means the worst are most likely to fail. To paraphrase Hayek – it is one of the fundamental functions of epistemic diversity to show which plans are false (Hayek 1982, p. 117).

I will now proceed to deliver the reconstructed pragmatist argument for Epistemic Contribution and, therefore, polynormativity, first in its condensed form, comment on it, and then present its looser version. The brief discussion on few (but by no means all) tentative requirements of the institutional order which would respect EC and polynormativity will follow.

3. CENTRAL ARGUMENT

The best epistemic system is in the interest of every agent, if this agent can enjoy the benefits of that system's output. No self-interested rational agent would deny herself the benefit of living in the best social epistemic system.

What is the standard according to which we judge an epistemic system as better or worse?

The issue of procedure-independent instrumental value of epistemic systems (thus, the standard we are discussing) is a common concern in epistemic democracy². I

² The particular problem among epistemic democrats with procedure-independent standard of the "correctness of the decision" that a particular epistemic system delivers according to which we should judge whether or not the epistemic system in question is better or worse than some other was probably best summed up by Peter when discussing Estlund's conception of legitimacy of democratic decision-making, which claims that democratic decision-making "can be held, in terms acceptable to all qualified points of view, to be epistemically the best (or close to it) among those that are better than random." (Estlund 2008, p. 98) Peter writes: "For Estlund's conception of democratic legitimacy to have any judgmental bite, there must be a procedure-independent right to make claims about which decisions are correct and which decision-making procedure is most likely to produce correct decisions. Interpreted in this way, the conception presupposes third-personal epistemic authority about the correctness of outcomes and about which decision-making procedure can best approximate it. But if there is such a right, democratic decision-making (...) appears either redundant or, if it is not redundant,

believe that the most convincing candidate for the standard of epistemic systems is how well they perform as belief-revision distribution mechanisms.

Belief-revision, for present purposes roughly, means changing one's mind in view of new evidence. "Belief-revision distribution" view restrains itself with regards to the variety of rich and dynamic debates in epistemology concerning particular epistemological values. Its claim is essentially moderate and minimal – it claims that every truth is the result of belief-revision.

The claim of this text is that the best belief-revision distribution mechanism is that which allows for most people to enter the epistemic cooperation. Furthermore, it will claim that once we deny access to our epistemic cooperation to any agent (a belief-reviser), we deny ourselves the particular *possible* belief-revision that she could contribute to it.

Epistemic cooperation is not exclusively population-wide decision-making (set-binding), but also includes agent's autonomous epistemic practice (subset-binding) which contribute in a myriad of ways to the overall epistemic output of the population. Epistemic cooperation, thus, includes populations (as mixed category of multiple communities and individuals), communities and individuals, cooperating in numerous ways to bring about population-level belief-revision. The institutional order of a population creates conditions of epistemic cooperation. Fully inclusive epistemic cooperation should, therefore, be reflected in the institutional order of the population.

Contributational Instrumentalist (CI) should claim that the best epistemic system, thus the system of epistemic cooperation most likely to deliver the desirable population-level belief-revision, is the one that allows for the most people to contribute, thus engage in belief-revision.

More precisely, she should claim that *whatever* the social structures of truth-tracking, they must include universally inclusive epistemic cooperation, a diversity of normative communities and substantial polynormative engagement.

More to the point, she should claim that with each person we fail to allow to develop the capability to be an epistemic contributor, we are losing the epistemic contribution this particular person could have given us. The disregard for capabilities of others is against the self-interest of each member of this society.

Contributational Instrumentalist's argument in the most condensed form could, I believe, be:

then its value must be non-epistemic." (Peter 2016, p. 139) This particular discussion, however, is very narrowly concerned with democracy. I will prefer to talk about "epistemic cooperation", as including democratic politics, but not reducible to it. However, even so, if we are to transpose my current concerns onto the concerns of a *narrow* epistemic democrat, the "correctness of the decision" in the case I'm trying to make hinges on the key question, and thus a standard for judging an epistemic system as better or worse, which is – *how likely is it that the system will revise an incorrect belief?* My claim, futhermore, will be that the more normatively diverse it is, the more likely it is to do so.

P1: If all knowledge is a result of agent-specific belief-revision,

P2 :and we deny agent X a position of a belief-reviser,

C: then we deny the population X (which agent X is a member of) the agent-X-specific set of belief-revisions.

4. CENTRAL ARGUMENT, UNPACKED

The unpacking of the central argument will now proceed in two steps. First I will comment of each premise and the conclusion, and then I will offer a somewhat longer re-telling of the argument.

P1 claims that all knowledge is a result of agent-specific belief-revision. This is a simple assertion, if rarely explicated. To learn (how to use concepts, exchange reasons, appropriately navigate the social and natural environment, and make complex usable theories about both) is to be able to revise beliefs when presented with appropriate evidence (which one can conceptualize *as* evidence). To be able to revise beliefs is to make inferences. Inferentialism leads to a specific kind of individualism – namely, only an individual can infer. A group cannot infer, it can merely distribute the inferred, specifically via *norms*. And when it does distribute it, it teaches the individual that inference X is correct. In order to learn that inference X is correct, the individual needs to be able to infer from the environmental cues (for instance, “people” “telling” “her”: “the inference X is correct”) that the inference X is correct. If the inference X is correct, it might be used in subsequent inferential patterns as a kind of a building block for new inferences.

“Good” inferential practices, and thus “good” *uses* of concepts and their webs of mutual entailments, are distributed with varying success through the population through various acts of learning. This does not mean necessarily that the concepts, or inferential patterns, exhaust the real-world occurrences they are supposed to make use of. They are sufficiently successful when real world offers no resistance to them that can be conceptualized by the agent and they sit well enough with a certain set of other inferences, concepts and, finally, commitments. They may be upgraded, and *are*, through individual acts of inferring. Through distribution (and, thus, enforcement), inferential practices become norms.

P2 and C go on to claim that if the beliefs of the individual are (at least to a relevant degree) built out of socially-acquired norms, and if only an individual can revise them, then Epistemic Contribution of that individual is desirable from the point-of-view of the population distributing those beliefs. Only individuals are belief-revisers, and only through individual acts of belief-revision can there be a pool of

common belief-revisions, available to all individuals to revise their false beliefs. The second step of this argument should claim that if we accept Epistemic Contribution as instrumental in this way, then we must also accept that the desirable population-level order is that of *diverse normative communities engaging in problem-solving with each other* – the order of polynormativity (OP).

So, the step I'd like to make now is that from EC to OP – and I believe this step is implicit in CI's argument. What we are after is a diversity of norms (and more precisely, *normative commitments*), and our best resource for these are minds “built” on the diversity of norms. Norms are robust, socially-acquired (even if their acquisition is based on biological abilities) guides to action that establish and upgrade conceptual schemes which allow us to deal with the environment. They play a fundamental role in forming our hypotheses about the world, making predictions, being able to rely on others, recognizing evidence-as-evidence, and establishing habits of upgrading our systems of belief³.

If we are to imagine the totality of included minds as normatively same (strictly speaking, an impossibility by itself, given the inherent cognitive diversity of the population), CI's argument would not stand – it is their difference that matters. The number (universal inclusion) is theoretically relevant because it raises diversity. As I noted before – normative diversity is the carrier of epistemically valuable possibility of belief-revision, and Epistemic Contribution is the carrier of normative diversity.

The first crucial thing to understand here is that the emergence of the new norm can be fostered only through communities within which individuals can actually develop their particular normative commitments. This means that the social system of knowledge must allow, and, maybe more to a point, *accelerate* the flourishing of diverse normative communities. The second crucial aspect of the best epistemic

³ This definition of norms contains what I believe to be their most relevant characteristics. Literature on norms is large and growing, and spawns numerous fields of study. The ongoing theoretical debates considered, I believe the definition presented here would mostly be regarded as plain and non-controversial. The following are only some of the most prominent works on social normativity: Bicchieri's seminal work *The Grammar of Society* offers an authoritative account of the way *social* norms work and change (Bicchieri 2006); the relation between inferentialist semantics and normative pragmatics (which is for our purposes of particular interest) is authoritatively presented in depth by Brandom in *Making it Explicit* (Brandom 2001); and North and Denzau's “Shared Mental Models: Ideologies and Institutions” (North and Denzau 1994), one of the central contributions to New Institutional Economics, gives a robust account of how “the action-outcome mappings” (probably the most general definition of norms I encountered) in mental models spread through the population to give rise to institutional relations. Also worth noting is that in “What Are Institutions?” Hodgson offers a discussion on the terminological issues regarding the difference between “norms” and “rules” (Hodgson 2006) which I will largely ignore in this text, for the sake of simplicity and because it appears strong conceptual point about the terminological difference is lacking. I will also use “norms” due to the philosophical tradition of talking about a “normative” x, as opposed to talking about “rule-based” or “rule-generating” or “rule-following” (all of which are integrated in “normative”) x.

social system is that it features *zones of engagement* (ZOE) of normatively diverse communities, which roughly must include⁴ 1) higher-stake explicit mutually-binding decision-making (most obviously instantiated in democratic politics), 2) lower-stake mutual exposure, engagement in problem-solving and deliberation (most obviously instantiated in public spaces, public fora and public schools, as well as various aspects of social life where different communities live amongst each other and share certain norms of engagement, social experiences, rituals or spaces), and 3) anonymous signaling between normative communities (most obviously instantiated in markets, and particularly global markets)⁵. Without *substantial* polynormative engagement, the epistemic benefit of a polynormative system is quite obviously absent.

I would now like to offer a somewhat looser rephrasing of CI's argument, a *particular pragmatist reconstruction* which largely avoids esoteric or particularly, to my knowledge, contested (at least in the pragmatist tradition) lines of theoretical inquiry. Its purpose is to make explicit further descriptive-epistemological commitments of CI. Its most controversial point will be a distinct mechanism of post-bad-bed recalibration, a technical point for "belief-revision distribution" view. Thus, it could be referred to as a Bad Bet Account (BBA)⁶ of Epistemic Contribution, and therefore polynormativity.

1. Human agent learns concepts through interaction with other agents and the rest of the environment. It learns concepts as *sets of normative commitments* – to learn concepts is to learn how to *use* them (in the web of their conceptual entailments) to *do* something.

2. Concepts must be communicable – otherwise they cannot be either taught or learned, nor can they be transmitted across the population in any capacity. Thus, concepts must be (sufficiently) such that they can be *made public*.

⁴ These are reflective of the procedures of harvesting of information dispersed through the population as standardly understood in the social epistemology: 1) votes, 2) talk, 3) prices (see Anderson 2006).

⁵ For an outstanding account of the issue of anonymous *relationships* see Wallis 2011.

⁶ I will not decisively mark the sources of each claim, both because this would lead to exegesis (which is not my intention) and because each claim is reduced to its least controversial form, and therefore cannot be solely attributed to a particular philosopher. I believe pragmatist tradition would largely agree with the majority of statements of BBA. Author that could, perhaps, be emphasized is Brandom, and in particular *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing and Discursive Commitment* (Brandom 2001), which offers the most comprehensive and convincing account of pragmatist philosophy I have encountered. BBA is also largely inspired by Sellars' seminal "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" (Sellars 1963). For particularly authoritative accounts of inferentialism and "translation in transmission" from the standpoint of cognitive anthropology, see Sperber & Wilson's *Relevance: Communication & Cognition* (Sperber & Wilson 1986) and Sperber's, *Explaining Culture: A Naturalistic Approach* (Sperber 1996) respectively.

3. Normative commitments require both conceptual and material compatibility – they must be (to a certain degree) compatible with other normative commitments and their proper use must generate lower resistance from the world than their non-proper use. When (somehow apparently) incompatible, some normative commitments must be revised. Thus, *concepts are inferences*.

4. If they are both public and inferences, concepts must be robust to an extent that they can be *both* “housed” in different minds and transmitted between those minds. Each act of “housing” and transmission are acts of *translation*. There is no “housing” or transmission of the concept without some degree of its change.

5. Human agents cannot predict the future with absolute certainty.

6. Each change to the concept makes its normative commitments a new bet as to its use. And, of course, each change in the environment requires an adjustment of normative commitments or wholesale new ones. Agent has to always bet in new bets. Some normative commitments emerge as better bets than others. But within the dynamic and unpredictable environment within (*and in relation to*) which we make our bets, there cannot be a final best bet. And we cannot know with certainty before the bet is performed if it is going to be the better bet.

7. We can, however, presume that certain bets are bad bets. For – while the good bet could have been mere luck (even if we continue to count on them, as we usually do), *bad bets, if recognized as bad bets, for the most part, immediately require some form of conceptual calibration – the revision of our normative commitments.*⁷

8. Distribution of belief-revision implies constraints and boundedness in the form of the history of bad bets. (How well this is done, and which bets will be recognized as bad bets by the social world, is a matter of epistemic development, but also, to a point, of contingency. This does not deny the fundamental mechanism of the history of bad bets.)

9. In order to generate a wealth of normative commitments sufficient to handle the environment, we need *different* agents (thus, *different* minds) making *different* bets – because we cannot know which agent (or agents) will make the right bet⁸. But more importantly, we need them to make bad bets.

⁷ Brandom writes: “Treating something as a representation involves acknowledging the possibility that it misrepresents – that the representational taking is a mistaking (the object represented does not exist, the state of affairs represented does not obtain). It is these attitudes of distinguishing in practice between representations that are taken to be correct and those taken to be incorrect that forge the connection between the notions of representational purport and representational success.” (Brandom 2001, p. 78)

⁸ Brandom writes: “(...) the collateral concomitant commitments available as auxiliary hypotheses in multipremise inferences vary from individual to individual (and from occasion to occasion or context to context). If they did not, not only the notion of communication but even that of empirical information would find no application. The significance of acquiring a commitment or making a claim whose content could be expressed by the use of a particular sentence, when it would be appropriate to do so and what the appropriate consequences of doing so would be, depends on what other commitments are available as further premises in assessing grounds and consequences. What is

10. *If we deny any agent the chance to make an epistemic bet, we deny all agents the chance to revise their normative commitments.* Thus we also deny ourselves something that is in *our best interest*.

11. Fricker's Epistemic Contribution, thus, is an instrument for the well-being of the totality of both present and *future* population.

I will now move on to discussing the few tentative requirements for an institutional order reflective of the severity of arguments for Epistemic Contribution and polynormativity.

5. THE INSTITUTIONAL ORDER OF POLYNORMATIVITY: A FEW TENTATIVE REQUIREMENTS

So we ascertained that Epistemic Contribution is a desirable trait of a social epistemic system, and that polynormativity is the requirement for it to be of value. This leaves us with an open question with regards the institutional order which would render the maintenance and harvesting of Epistemic Contribution and polynormativity possible. Full inquiry into the institutional order reflecting EC and polynormativity is, however, beyond the scope of this text. I will merely make explicit and briefly comment on some of its more obvious tentative requirements (or at least, themes that should be seriously discussed further). These have not, in any sense, defined the institutional order in question sufficiently, nor are they, by any means, exhaustive – other requirements of OP will certainly emerge through further research.

The pursuit of the institutional order of polynormativity is the pursuit of the higher-level “rules of the game” (North 1990) of a polynormative society of inclusive epistemic cooperation. Institutional order of polynormativity is the one which is adaptable to dispersed knowledge from both democracy and the market, as well as numerous other discovery and change processes, but maintains normative diversity and Epistemic Contribution. From the agent's perspective, the institutional order must maintain both that 1) the failure of nominated norm is evident (for otherwise, the signal is distorted) and 2) that *the cost of failure of a nominated norm does not exceed the benefit of nominating a new one* (for otherwise, EC is not enacted).

an appropriate ground or consequence of that commitment from the point of view of one set of background beliefs may not be from the point of view of another.” (Brandom 2001, p. 139)

Institutional order of polynormativity will to a scholar well versed in works of the New Institutional Economics (NIE)⁹ and the Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework immediately be translated into a “polyinstitutional” order. The design of this order might as well follow Ostrom’s polycentric governance¹⁰ – with talk of diversity of normative communities engaging into the governing of their shared polynormative society, we can recognize a familiarity with her image of “the complex, polycentric systems of governance that are created by individuals who have considerable autonomy to engage in self-governance” (Ostrom 2005, p. 258). This text is no place to engage in serious discussion of understanding the relation between polycentric governance and the order of polynormativity. I would, however, surely admit a deep admiration for and inspiration from Ostrom’s work. Furthermore, research on the institutional adaptability for remedying epistemically distortive social inequalities is surely on the agenda for anyone interested in the order of polynormativity, as is the research on cooperation in plural societies¹¹.

I will now list the few tentative requirements of the institutional order of polynormativity, and proceed to offer a brief and insufficient comment on each.

- 1) OP includes development of diverse normative communities and diverse zones of engagement.
- 2) OP includes development of an “ecology” of expert systems.
- 3) OP includes agents’ epistemic suboptimality as a resource.
- 4) OP includes agent being able to move between normative communities.
- 5) OP includes declustering disadvantage.

- 1) OP includes development of diverse normative communities and diverse ZOE.

The case for this should have been made by now. The exact design of the institutional order sensitive to EC is, certainly, a work in progress, and to a point, if we accept that OP includes the upgrading of its own rules of the game (while maintaining EC), will always be a work in progress. For now, we could posit the basic tension between effective and adaptive mechanisms of harvesting knowledge emergent from the overlapping inferential practices of diverse normative communities and the inherent difficulty of sustainable contact (and of the sustainability of the epistemically valuable aspects of disagreement) among those

⁹ New Institutionalism, the richest contemporary body of research into institutional orders of societies, is largely founded on the denial of two persistent dogmas in social science, particularly neo-classical economics (but the extent of the confusion is a matter of debate): 1) non-socialized utility maximizing agent with perfect knowledge, and 2) the institutional order of the society as reducible to the state/market dichotomy (with, in neo-classical economics, costless-transaction markets and state as an exogenous actor). For New Institutionalism, see North 1990, Hodgson 2006, Greif & Laitin 2004 and Peters 1999.

¹⁰ See Ostrom 1990 and Ostrom 2005.

¹¹ Any list of the greatest contemporary philosophers of cooperation in plural societies must certainly include Gerald Gaus. See Gaus 2011 and Gaus 2013.

communities. In other words, the question is how to make those with different rules of cooperation cooperate amongst each other?

In their work “Group rewards, groups composition and information sharing: A motivated information processing perspective”, Super, Li, Ishqaidef and Guthrie conclude that “(...) not only do groups need to access dispersed or specialized information they also need to effectively process that information once it is brought into the group discussion space. It is only when group members have unique knowledge sets and effectively share this knowledge can the benefits of group decision-making be realized. For optimal group outcomes, organizational conditions must be conducive to discouraging a bias towards discussing common information and instead *encourage the elicitation and discussion of unique information* – making sure that it is heard, repeated, considered, and incorporated into the group process (Brodbeck et al., 2007)” (Super et al. 2016, p. 32, my italics). On the other hand, as Ostrom notes, “If the participants in a situation come from many different cultures, speak different languages, and are distrustful of one another, the costs of devising and sustaining effective rules are substantially increased” (Ostrom 2005, p. 27). Even with trust established to a certain degree, which I would like to think of OP being able to, the difference in social normativity remains playing a difficult role of being both the source of epistemic value and an impediment for that epistemic value to emerge. I do not, however, think the situation is in any way doomed, nor that we should overstate this difficulty, even though it is a real difficulty to a large degree. The constitutional protection of pluralism, the abundance of public spaces, the freedom of speech and thought, the fights against pathological social and economic inequalities, all contribute to the development of the order of polynormativity. But more to the point – *normatively diverse people can cooperate*. Through institutional arrangement that fosters this cooperation, through exposure to one another and mutual respect and trust, normative communities can establish provisory norms and protocols of translation for dealing with one another. But also, we must adopt a more complex view of normative diversity – person belonging to a group A and a person belonging to a group B can both belong to a group C. Neighbors deliberating on the problem of their neighborhood can find a “common language” despite the differences in their “mother tongues”. Problem-solving situations can be faced by holding back “the vocabulary” of a normative community while utilizing its “grammar” to develop novel ways of thinking about the problem. Muldoon reflects on this problem of “how to mitigate the burdens of increased evaluative diversity”(Muldoon 2013, p. 124) in “Diversity and the Division of Cognitive Labor”, and proposes, in line with pragmatist tendency to imagine the social conceptual development as similar to a scientific endeavor, the solutions from the area of philosophy of science researching big interdisciplinary projects. Muldoon writes: “Galison (1997) developed the ‘trading zone’ metaphor for scientific collaborations

that involve multiple disciplines of science and engineering. In anthropology, a trading zone is where two or more communities meet to trade goods, even if they often lack a common language. Pidgins or creoles develop, enabling people to be able to trade effectively, even if they do not always understand everything that the other party would like to express. Similarly in science, Galison argues that scientists and engineers develop common symbols and scientific pidgins that enable information exchange. Given the need for successful coordination, new kinds of expertise can emerge: the ability to facilitate exchanges between disciplines becomes increasingly valuable in these kinds of environments” (Muldoon 2013, p. 124). The understanding and development of this “new kind of expertise” is one of special interest for the institutional order of polynormativity.

2) OP includes development of an “ecology” of expert systems.

This requirement is noted simply to discourage attempts to disqualify the presented argument by calling upon an image of the society lacking the emergent structures, divisions and hierarchies of epistemic labor. On the contrary, the claim by this text should extend in the following fashion: to be an epistemically superior society means to be the society that makes best decisions as to its division of epistemic labor. The argument is merely that exclusion from epistemic cooperation is detrimental to the system – it does not claim that epistemic cooperation must have the structure that denies evaluating epistemic expertise. Again, quite the contrary, it claims that the inclusive polynormative epistemic cooperation, if it is the best epistemic system, will also generate the best structure of evaluating and utilizing expertise. The epistemic system that never delegated certain (epistemic) tasks according to some (preferably epistemic) standard of reputation would not only, surely, be a dubious candidate for the best epistemic system.

However, the question becomes more complex with regards to the political decision-making, in the discussion regarding the benefits of democracy and epistocracy¹². For the time being, we can note that neither will do by themselves. Democracy, as we noted discussing Dewey, can be hijacked, and the threat of majority tyranny looms. Aside from the constitutional protection of certain values (such as polynormativity) and the policy-making expertise, politics do include specific knowledge (at least from the standpoint of international relations), and can include making unpopular decisions. Democracy is a complex institutional order, but its two basic aspects, aggregation and deliberation, have a political and epistemic role¹³. However, it is not sufficient for the maintenance of polynormativity, as we

¹² For a sophisticated discussion of the division of epistemic labor between experts and citizens, see Cerovac 2016.

¹³ Anderson in her “The Epistemology of Democracy”, following Dewey, offers particularly insightful account and analysis of the epistemic value of institutional order of democracy. It has a particular resonance with our current concerns because it gives significant epistemic import to

have seen. On the other hand, epistocracy, in its most elemental sense of experts governing, without democratic accountability, is a tyranny in which “the oligarchs have no incentive to inform themselves about the larger, changing cognitive diversity of the larger group” (Landemore 2012b, p. 264). Now, one might argue that there might be an epistocratic regime sensitive to EC and polynormativity, and their epistemic benefits. After all, if they are epistocrats, and if EC and polynormativity are features of the best epistemic social system, this should surely be the case. The question then is – which institutional order (and therefore, a mechanism) would our wise epistocrats choose to harvest and accelerate polynormativity and EC? I believe their institutional order would include a significant amount of practices similar to or same as relevant aspects of democratic politics. If this is so, then the dichotomy is somewhat void. The institutional order of polynormativity includes expert systems, presumably even political expert systems, but retains the epistemic value of the technology of democracy, as well as the deep and strong commitment to Epistemic Contribution, universal inclusion, and to the unlikely belief-reviser.

3) OP includes agents’ epistemic suboptimality as a resource.

In this text I claim that the population has the greatest chance of epistemic optimality if it allows all agents into the epistemic cooperation. This reduces the possibilities of false belief reigning simply because it increases the chances of a belief-revision – of this belief being recognized as false. In this particular story, agents’ epistemic suboptimality is a given in all epistemic systems, but inclusive polynormative system allows for the greatest chance of an act of epistemic suboptimality *to be used* to recalibrate the distributed normative commitments. Bad bets have value for OP, while being stuck at an suboptimal equilibrium is less likely in the order of polynormativity than in any other social epistemic system.

universal inclusion and its relation to dissent after a certain decision has been made (in contrast to epistemic democrats’ usual focus on decision-making), and thus of something akin to universal inclusion as instrumental for public belief-revision (Anderson 2006). For instance, Anderson writes: “Ideally, we would want the political order to be so structured as to include methods of self-correction, so that it can steadily increase its epistemic powers. This is the point of the Deweyan model of democracy as an embodiment of scientific method. Just as the solution to scientific problems is to do more science, ‘the cure for the ailments of democracy is more democracy’ (Dewey 1981c, 327). For democracy, like science, embodies the two practices crucial to self-correction: dissent and experimentation” (Anderson 2006, p. 19). It should be noted also that Anderson would probably object to the way I have framed the debate at the beginning concerning the primacy of diversity over democracy by insisting that democracy necessarily includes diversity (for epistemic reasons, as well), and that the institutional order that fails to do so cannot be considered to be the institutional order of democracy. I am prone to agree, actually; but I will retain for the purposes of this text the distinction whereby democracy can result in an anti-democratic system (and an anti-EC and anti-polynormative system, which is our chief concern here) if it is not protected by other means aside from majority (or ever supermajority) rule and public deliberation.

But there is a more distinct story to be told with regards to epistemic suboptimality. Kitcher has shown that behavior rational at the community level when observed at an individual level may appear irrational (Kitcher 1990). For instance, not being sensitive to a certain evidence X can be seen as epistemically suboptimal. But, if we think polynormatively, this is precisely what a normative community means. *Normative diversity means being differently sensitive (or susceptible) to evidence* – otherwise, the epistemic value of normative diversity would come into question. Zollman’s work on network epistemology (Zollman 2010) further clarifies this point. Using agent-based modeling, Zollman shows that in a highly connected network it is preferable agents have extreme priors. This guards against high sensitivity to input from network connection, which essentially means that if you don’t exhibit certain amount of dogmatism you will simply change your mind with every new information that comes your way to the point of *being unable to form a system of normative commitments at all*. Thus, polynormative system should be the one of extreme priors and high connectivity.

An assumption, already alluded to, must be explicated here – namely that I treat general human society as somehow similar to a scientific community (Zollman and Kitcher both talk of scientific communities exclusively, and the present subsumation of human society under epistemic habits of scientific communities is wholly my fault). In my defense, a) it is in the tradition of pragmatism to think so; b) nothing in these analyses seems to me to be controversial when applied to general human society; c) when we talk of epistemic life of human societies, we necessarily talk about a behavior that could be marked scientific in the widest sense of being sensitive to changing one’s mind about X when presented with a sufficient evidence that not-X. When it comes to normative cooperation, we must also note its epistemic character – the search for the best arrangement of our inclusive plural society is at least partially an epistemic endeavor. While a number of considerations of this best arrangement could be regarded as non-epistemic, we can still treat the solution to the problem of this best arrangement as an instance of knowledge¹⁴.

4) OP includes agent being able to move between normative communities.

Now, this point is wholly prescriptive. Normative communities cannot bar exit to their members. This much is mostly clear¹⁵. Individual autonomy overrides

¹⁴ Hayek would probably object to the notion of us being able to treat an optimal system of social epistemic cooperation as an object of knowledge. However, we need not go that far. Each inference that *contributes to* that system, without necessarily being capable of conceptualizing the whole of the system, can be an instance of knowledge, or at least of the best belief-revision available (if this is the only attainable epistemic ambition).

¹⁵ For an overview and critical reflection on the right to exit in contemporary political philosophy, see Fagan 2006.

community rules when it comes to the individual's choice of abandoning a certain normative life.

The discretion of managing entrance, however, is a more difficult matter. Universal inclusion on the level of the population does not entail (universal) inclusion at the level of a community, it entails cooperative effort and peaceful coexistence with those outside of the community¹⁶. This means the group can deny its member's EC (due to, for instance, some hierarchical issue) – however, it must preserve its member's *ability to EC* if at any point the member decides to exit the community.

Cases of group autonomy with regards to barring entrance are varied. In the most banal example, if I want a band with only saxophone and drums, the person with viola cannot be a member of my band – these are the groups which have a definitive set of roles. Then there are xenophobic groups, whose right to xenophobia could be (and maybe, should be) challenged, but can hardly be denied without consultation. And then there is the situation in which a member of the group has a lower chance of changing the group norms, where the group can be afforded discretion of throwing the member out unless she complies with the group's normative commitments. This is in effect barring the entrance.

The problem of moving between groups is hardly exhausted by this feeble overview of some issues with free entrance. However, we might conclude that without some level of such autonomy on the questions of entrance, the communities will not be able to develop their idiosyncratic normativities, and therefore, the epistemic value of polynormativity will be threatened. When problems with entrance arise, however, some public deliberation is surely in order – the result might be either that group's autonomy is fully respected or that groups has to adapt to new circumstances. Within the cooperative ethos of polynormativity, the arguments will, hopefully, show us the way.

5) OP includes declustering disadvantage.

“Declustering disadvantage” (Wolff & de-Shalit 2007) is an innovative failure-first approach to egalitarian politics developed by Wolff and de-Shalit. Instead of thinking of egalitarian politics in the way of making blanket equality policies which are too formal to be substantive, imply deeply problematic intrusions into personal life or whose currency of equality is merely throwing money at the problem, the issue of equality must be addressed by scanning the social world for *specific* inequalities, and particularly “corrosive clusters of disadvantage”. Corrosive clusters of disadvantage are configurations of social reality in which a certain disadvantage entails other

¹⁶ Equally, normative communities should be able to deny the right to EC to their members *within* their community (this is a part of their normative discretion), but they shouldn't be able to deny them right to EC *outside* of their communities.

disadvantages, making the individual less likely to ‘solve’ the disadvantage, if ‘solving’ it was even an option. For instance, “(...) many researchers have found that children who are hungry cannot study properly and their results are much inferior to satisfied children” (Wolff & de-Shalit 2007, p. 127). This is, obviously, only an illustration. The clusters are varied and complex, and we will not delve into detailed structural analysis of them presently.

I merely wish to make clear that declustering disadvantages is a top priority for any polynormative order – disadvantages deny the possibility for Epistemic Contribution. The deep inequality, political, *social* and economic, is detrimental to the epistemic cooperation, and distortive with regards the epistemic signaling. On the other hand, EC and OP are theoretically very favorably positioned to remedy corrosive disadvantage. If we take each citizen as a knowledge giver¹⁷ (a belief-reviser), we will structure her environment¹⁸ for her to be capable of giving us knowledge.

Declustering disadvantages calls for an institutional order that can recognize and efficiently and *appropriately* (March & Olsen 2016) remedy clusters of disadvantage, both when they become corrosive and, preferably, before they do.

The policy recommendations with regards to the declustering disadvantage is beyond the scope of this text. However, enormous great work on policy design from both NIE and IAD is certainly a recommended starting point for further research.

CONCLUSION

Human society is, among other things, a mechanism for the distribution of belief-revision. Revision of a false belief is fundamental to a mind dealing with the environment. However, after a certain threshold of development, to change one’s mind is not something humans are very keen on doing. If we want to design the best social epistemic system, this “inertia” will be relevant, and will entail that the

¹⁷ Both Fricker and Wolff and de-Shalit equally stress the notion of “giving” as a seriously disregarded aspect of Capabilities. Fricker notes: “If the familiar figure at the centre of liberal conceptions of well-being is a receiver of goods, then Wolff and De-Shalit present us with the implied but forgotten counterpart—someone who enjoys the esteem that comes with the capability to give in the broad context of social reciprocity” (Fricker 2015, p. 75).

¹⁸ An issue could be raised here: what if certain normative communities (for instance, those that deny their members to epistemically contribute within the community) object to the qualified equalitarianism required by OP, and wish to abstain from having their members’ disadvantages declustered? If we, for our present purposes, aside the political and moral concerns with such communities, and answers that could be given to them derived those disciplines, from *strictly* OP point of view the disadvantages that threaten the capability to epistemically contribute outside of the community and in the future, when the member may choose to exit, must be remedied. This means health and an access to a certain variety of ZOE (particularly public schools) must be protected.

cooperation of many different minds using many different normative strategies is more likely to deliver a particular belief-revision. This understanding leads to, what I believe is, a strong system-level case for universal inclusion (understood through Fricker's Epistemic Contribution) as the carrier of epistemic diversity comprising both cognitive and normative diversity. This in turn implies the institutional order responsive to EC (and particularly its instrumental epistemic aspect) is the one of polynormativity. If we fail to develop such an institutional order, we have failed to do what is in our best interest.

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THE ROLE OF EXPERTS IN A DEMOCRATIC DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

In recent discussions regarding social epistemology, and especially among political philosophers, there has been a marked increase in the importance of the question of the epistemic justification of democracy, which ought to be, along ethical and political justification, a necessary condition of attaining democratic legitimacy. The newfound importance of the issue of the epistemic justification of democracy within political philosophy can be largely attributed to the works of Fabienne Peter, whose contribution is best illustrated through her successful melding of political and epistemological issues, a feat long evaded by many of her colleagues. According to Peter, the instrumentalizing nature of the standard approach to the epistemic justification of democracy fails to incorporate the irreducible pluralist value of individual agency and the procedural epistemic value of collective discussions.

Her proceduralist critiques of the standard approach to epistemic justification have rejected the justification of the inclusion of experts in democratic decision-making, maintaining that democracy can be epistemically justified without the involvement of experts in decision-making processes. Fabienne Peter has undoubtedly offered the best articulation of the proceduralist objection to the inclusion of experts in democratic decision-making. Once I have provided a summary of her argumentation, I will attempt to offer a critical review and elaborate an alternative approach to the democratic and epistemic justifications of including experts in decision-making processes.

KEYWORDS

Decision-making process, experts, proceduralism, epistemic instrumentalism, political instrumentalism, hybrid model, reasonable disagreement

INTRODUCTION

In recent discussions regarding social epistemology, and especially among political philosophers, there has been a marked increase in the importance of the question of the epistemic justification of democracy, which ought to be, along ethical and political justification, a necessary condition of attaining democratic legitimacy. It is claimed that, apart from being justified as a politically and ethically fair system,

democracy should also be an epistemically justified social system capable of generating the best possible decisions. Proponents of the so-called standard epistemic justification of democracy base their thinking on the assumption that democratic legitimacy must additionally be grounded on the production of epistemically high-quality decisions (true, truth-sensitive, truth-conducive, correct, justified, rational, epistemically responsible and so on¹). However, this assumption is often challenged by those who do not hold that epistemic justification is either necessary or conducive to democratic legitimacy or, on the other hand, those who accept the necessity of the epistemic justification of democracy, but deem that it cannot be reduced to the production of true or justified decisions.² Such reactions are highly influenced by a stance regarding the status of experts within the democratic decision-making process, the viewpoint that epistemic justification necessarily entails a certain notion of expertism (experts' elitism) or even epistocracy, which is a stark antithesis to democracy.

PROCEDURALIST CRITIQUE OF THE ROLE OF EXPERTS IN THE DEMOCRATIC DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

In discussions regarding the epistemic justification of democracy, the standpoint of epistemic proceduralism is certainly among the more relevant and minutely elaborated positions. Proponents of epistemic proceduralism, including prominent supporters such as David Estlund and Fabienne Peter (Estlund 1997, 2008, Peter 2008, 2016), claim that epistemically high-quality decisions are based on the appropriate democratic procedures. It is crucial to note that both of them emphasise the necessity of eliminating the privileged treatment of experts taking part in the decision-making process from such proper democratic procedures. At first glance, many would agree with the proceduralist rejection of privilege as anti-democratic and

1 The debate about which epistemic values ought to be preferred is external to the topic of this article. Of course, from an epistemic perspective, there are numerous differences between presenting arguments in favour of any particular stance, be it Philip Kitcher's (Kitcher 2011) pragmatic view that a democratic system is legitimate if it manages to successfully solve the problems of its citizens, or the stance that a system's legitimacy lies within the reliability of its truth-sensitive decision making mechanisms, a standpoint defended by Alvin Goldman and Thomas Christiano (Goldman 2010, Christiano 2012). The discussion within this article focuses on the question of whether we should introduce epistemic virtues unrelated to the democratic procedure (virtues which would consequently be used to evaluate the decisions generated by that procedure) or claim that epistemic virtues reside within the procedure (so that democratic procedures inherently generate epistemically valuable decisions).

2 In the remainder of the article I will use the terms *correct*, *true* and *truth-conducive* as generic expressions representing other epistemic values, constantly referring to the epistemic standpoint that there are epistemic values unrelated to the democratic procedure on the basis of which it is possible to evaluate decisions.

inherently conflicted with the democratic notions of the freedom and equality of all citizens. The privileged treatment of experts would thus seem particularly anti-democratic, being a form of favouring the elite. While, for example, affirmative action and the general privileging of the disenfranchised or the underrepresented are not considered anti-democratic, the privileging of experts can hardly be justified using democratic principles. However, a mere second glance shows that such an initial attitude entails further dilemmas. Namely, the elaboration of the reasoning behind the exclusion of experts from decision-making processes clearly portrays proceduralism as a standpoint willing to sacrifice the epistemic quality of decisions, or, differently worded, their very truthfulness. Specifically, epistemic proceduralists ground their stance on a critique of the standard approach to the epistemic justification of democracy, a viewpoint claiming that democratic processes should generate decisions which can be considered correct from the perspective of some independent standard of epistemic value. This independent standard of assessing democratic decisions is usually defined using the concepts of 'truth' and 'truth-conduciveness' (truth-sensitivity, 'problem solving', 'correctness', 'reliability' or like).

For example, J.J. Rousseau's theory of 'correctness' supports the claim that political decisions are only legitimate if they are correct, and this correctness is assessed on the basis of standards independent of the procedures used to generate the decisions. In other words, according to Rousseau, a political decision must be correct, as we are not supposed to justify it solely by referring to the fact it was generated using a democratic process that included civic discussions or the valid exchange of arguments. Joshua Cohen may have offered a more precise definition of this independent standard of correctness for the assessing the epistemic quality of decisions: he postulated an ideal-decision generated by an ideal democratic procedure (Cohen 1986). This decision would thus become the criterion by which the epistemic value of any subsequent decision generated by a real and concrete procedure ought to be assessed. An outcome generated using an ideal procedure would be considered the independent measure of correctness for the assessment of actual decision-making processes. Even though Cohen's standard does not presuppose realism, or any other metaphysical concept of political truth or truth related to the common good, his ideal procedure specifies the counterfactual conditions of the best possible public debate regarding political issues: the harmonization or democratic decision generated by such a procedure is the best possible decision that can be achieved on the basis of currently available information and arguments. It is thus correct in relation to sub-ideal approximations characteristic of real democratic decision-making processes. Alvin Goldman, unlike the aforementioned authors, approaches this topic from the perspective of (thematically expanded) social epistemology (Goldman 2010). Defending the stance of so-called *reliability democracy*, he singularly states that consensus attained by the

means of just democratic procedures is not automatically worthy of being considered epistemically justified. No aspect of a thus achieved consensus represents an epistemological contribution to democratic theory, in spite of being, of course, politically justified. A rational public debate is only epistemically valuable if it fulfils the condition of reliability or truth-conduciveness.

Proponents of epistemic proceduralism have set forward various objections to such an approach to the justification of democratic decisions, one of the most important being the issue of the role of experts in the decision-making process, usually formulated as the problem of epistocracy. Specifically, the standard approach which assumes that the truth/correctness of a decision constitutes the legitimacy of a democracy, is highly unlikely to avoid the privileging of experts as the best 'guides' to truth/correctness, who thus ought to be entrusted with making decisions. Proceduralists claim that, within a democratic debate, no one, including the experts, should be in any way privileged, as citizens cannot be expected to adhere to the stances of the experts' elite rather than to contribute as equals. The introduction of any independent criterion of assessing the epistemic quality of democratic decisions – be it a criterion of truth, correctness, truth-sensitivity or like – necessarily entails a anti-democratic tendency to favour experts. Epistocracy gives rise to a myriad of further issues, such as the question of opting for the most credible expert within a discordant group, or, differently stated, the problem of resolving disagreements between experts. Such cases raise the question of choosing experts who can pose as arbitrators regarding matters of truth and correctness. Furthermore, certain authors will claim that there are no genuine experts for political and moral topics, as there is no objective and universally accepted expertise that could warrant the formation of such authority (Rawls 1993). It is stated that there is no conceptual relationship between truth and democracy, unlike the one which links, for example, truth and science. Democratic processes are certainly not comparable with the convincing methods of attaining truth in medicine or physics, scientific disciplines that rest of the stances and works of experts. In such cases the demand for accepting the standpoints of experts can only seem reasonable. However, political decisions are not made in a manner reminiscent of scientific seminars. One could possibly alleviate this initial rejection of the existence of experts by choosing to acknowledge their existence and consequent ability to act as guides to correct political decisions, perhaps even claiming that it is possible to select the best among conflicted experts. However, even in such circumstances, the stances of experts cannot be imposed upon those who bear different opinions. This is due to the fact that experts can never be entirely neutral as they have particular interests and preferences which affect their

stances (Estlund 2003, Christiano 2008)³. Epistemic proceduralists will conclude this discussion by making a statement essential to their position – in politics, a certain stance can be considered epistemically acceptable regardless of not being true/correct.

The newfound importance of the issue of the epistemic justification of democracy within political philosophy can be largely attributed to the works of Fabienne Peter, whose contribution is best illustrated through her successful connecting of political and epistemological issues, a feat long evaded by many of her colleagues. Particular value can be attributed to her lucid critique of the standard approach, based on the claim that it instrumentalizes the significance of the democratic procedure. Peter holds that its instrumentalization automatically devalues democracy, reducing it to mere means to attaining an alternate goal, such as the production and dissemination of knowledge or true/correct beliefs (Peter 2008). According to Peter, the instrumentalizing nature of the standard approach to the epistemic justification of democracy fails to incorporate the irreducible pluralist value of individual agency and the procedural epistemic value of collective discussions. Furthermore, from Peter's standpoint, an approach which focuses solely on the truth/correctness of the resultant decision necessarily separates the significance of the democratic procedure from the merits of learning, failing to realize that procedural values entail intrinsic epistemic virtue. The same stance, although a bit more minutely elaborated, can be found in Peter's most recent work (Peter 2016).

In short, the proceduralist critiques of the standard approach to epistemic justification have mostly, in a more or less explicit manner, rejected the justification of the inclusion of experts in democratic decision-making, maintaining that democracy can be epistemically justified without the involvement of experts in decision-making processes. Fabienne Peter has undoubtedly offered the best articulation of the proceduralist objection to the inclusion of experts in democratic decision-making. Once I have provided a summary of her argumentation, I will attempt to offer a critical review and elaborate an alternative approach to the democratic and epistemic justifications of including experts in decision-making processes.

EPISTEMIC INSTRUMENTALISM AND AUTHORITY DILEMMA

³ It is important to note that critics of epistocracy aren't only epistemic proceduralists or those who deny the relevance of epistemic justification. Christiano, for example, supports the standard approach to epistemic justification while remaining critical of epistocracy (Christiano 2012).

Peter distinguishes two kinds of decision making situations: (i) ones in which there are third-person authorities or experts and (ii) others in which there are no third-person authorities or experts. While the first decision making process can not be democratic, the second can be considered as such. It seems that she is here rather consistent with the positions elaborated in her previous works: a democratic decision making process excludes experts. The hidden assumption here is again that politics is an area substantively different from science or other areas in which there are experts. According to Peter, there is a certain intrinsic and insolvable tension between expert decisions-making processes and democratic decision making processes.

The rationale behind the fact that democratic decision making processes exclude experts lies in the thesis that the epistemic value of a democratic decision-making process is not derived from its epistemic outcomes or, differently stated, the correctness/truth of the resultant decisions. On the contrary, the epistemic value of a democratic decision making process lies in the fair and mutually accountable procedure of deliberation. She argues in favour of her thesis, appealing to situations in which adjustments and reasonable disagreements are epistemically valuable solutions, rather than correct outcomes (decisions). According to Peter, the very existence of justified and reasonable disagreement between peers proves that (one) correct or true outcome is not necessarily an epistemically valuable requirement.

Contrary to Peter, I would like to argue here that (i) even if we accept that the sheer privileging experts in the decision making process is not democratic, there is a role for experts in a democratic decision-making process (ii) the epistemic value of a democratic decision making process lies not only in the fair deliberative procedure, but also in the correctness or truth of its outcome (rationality, justification, problem-solving capacity, truth-conductivness or like) and (iii) reasonable disagreement does not exclude the epistemic value of correct or true outcomes but, on the contrary, relies on it.

As a full-blooded proceduralist, Peter builds her stance on the critiques of the standard approach, which presupposes the epistemic value of a true outcome. She ascribes to the standard approach the label of epistemic instrumentalism, that stance that it sacrifices democratic rationale to the epistemic one. More precisely, when writing of epistemic instrumentalism, Peter is referring to: (i) the view that epistemic value is derived from epistemic outcomes, (ii) the view that a correct decision is a desirable epistemic outcome, (iii) the view that the epistemic justification of democracy depends on an epistemically correct outcome. Defined in such a way, epistemic instrumentalism implies that democracy only has instrumental value. Peter claims that many epistemic democrats have, more or less explicitly, embraced the epistemic instrumentalist defence of democracy, arguing that democratic procedure is a good means – or at least a good enough means – for arriving at correct decisions (tracking the truth). They do this by claiming that the diversity of perspectives in

democratic deliberation improves the correctness of the final decision, or that democratic deliberation insures a wider pool of evidence for the final decision, or even that the fairness and inclusiveness of democratic procedures generate the reliability necessary for reaching the truth. In one way or another, all of these approaches sacrifice the intrinsic value of the democratic procedure to the epistemic goal of attaining a correct or truth-conducive decision. In short, according to Peter, the main failure of epistemic instrumentalism lies within the assumption that the epistemic value of decisions is reducible to their correctness or truth-conduciveness.

Expertism is really grounded on the assumption that the epistemic value of democratic deliberation lies in the true/correct outcome (decision). Expertism, in contrast with the aforementioned positions, is really the stance that experts need to have a privileged role in the decision making process because they are, in comparison with other citizens, the most reliable guides to correct or true decisions. If the legitimacy of a decision is in its correctness/truth, there is no reason not to additionally privilege the opinions of experts. For these very reasons, Peter believes that (in spite of the legitimacy of the experts' decision-making process for some purposes and in some circumstances) experts and democratic decision-making cannot be harmonized.

However, if one wanted to reject expertism as non-democratic on such an argument, she would need to ascribe the same label to other non-expertistic stances that designate correct or true decisions as the goal of democratic deliberation. Peter is aware of the fact that the inclusion of epistemic outcomes or correctness/truth into democratic decision-making processes generates the problem of the adjacent role of experts. However, she is also aware that she cannot reject expertism without rejecting non-expertistic stances that claim that democratic fairness or inclusiveness improves the correctness of the final decision. And she did this through her critique of epistemic instrumentalism. In short, Peter's reasoning commences with the premise that the privileging of the opinions of experts introduces illegitimacy into the democratic decision-making process (which needs to be based on freedom and equality) and closes with the conclusion that correctness and truth cannot constitute the epistemic value of democratic decision-making. Consequently, she not only qualifies expertism as non-democratic or instrumentalists' stance, but ascribes this label to an entire spectrum of stances based on the assumption that it is only true decisions which entail epistemic value.

In her most recent article, Peter articulated the problem of epistemic instrumentalism as the authority dilemma (Peter, 2016). If practical authority is justified on epistemic grounds, then legitimate practical authority is non-democratic. If, on the other hand, the practical authority of democracy is to be legitimate, it must be justified on non-epistemic grounds. We can also word it in an alternative manner: in the areas of decision-making where there is third-person epistemic authority, we

can choose to adhere to those who know what the correct decision is, in which case our decision-making is not democratic; if we insist on democratic decision-making, we can't defend the legitimacy of democracy on epistemic grounds, but must defend it on purely practical grounds. So, the defence of democracy characteristic of an epistemic instrumentalist is self-undermining, as the very epistemic circumstances it presupposes are incompatible with democracy, claims Peter.

The problem arises from what the epistemic instrumentalist conception of democratic legitimacy presupposes about epistemic authority, or from what constitutes the epistemic value of a decision-making process: if there is a correct decision to be made, and if someone has legitimate epistemic authority to make claims about what the correct decision is, the epistemic case for democracy crumbles. According to Peter, the only way to sustain both the epistemic and the democratic justification of practical authority is in the rejection of the assumption that the epistemic value of democracy lies in the correct or true outcome. Such a solution, consequently, points toward rejecting the role of experts in a democratic decision-making process.

Instead of epistemic instrumentalism, Peter proposes proceduralism or, more precisely, procedural epistemic value as the alternative to the epistemic value of seeking correct or true outcomes. Her aim is to show that the deliberative democratic procedure itself, i.e. the process of exchanging reasons with others and of adjusting one's beliefs in response to claims made by others, may have epistemic value – above and beyond the value of making correct decisions. She understands this procedural value of democracy as starkly contrasted to the instrumental value of democracy which she had previously criticized.

EPISTEMIC INSTRUMENTALISM VS POLITICAL INSTRUMENTALISM

Firstly, I can agree with Peter that certain forms of the epistemic justification of democracy sacrifice democratic values to the epistemic value of correctness and truth. For instance, Plato's epistocracy, as the most radical form of instrumentalism, explicitly sacrifices democratic values to the epistemic value of truth. I can also concur with Peter that such an epistocratic approach, focused only on the true outcome, cannot be justified because it ignores the value of democratic procedures as well as the value of the learning process through public deliberation and mutual accountability. However, it would be inappropriate to identify Plato's epistocracy with stances such as, for instance, Goodin's claim that democratic deliberation multiplies the perspectives or the diversity of evidence from which we aim to derive decisions of epistemically higher quality. Goodin surely did not underestimate the epistemic value of collective deliberation, as well as the value of mutual accountability.

Secondly, I agree with Peter's diagnosis of the problem as an authority dilemma: there is a certain conflict between epistemic and democratic justification of political authority, or between political values and epistemic values in the justification of democracy. In the justification of democracy, I coincide with Peter's claim that the tension between the epistemic aim of truth and correctness on one side and of democratic fairness on the other cannot be solved by epistemic instrumentalism because it sacrifices/instrumentalizes democratic values to epistemic values. However, I disagree that focusing on epistemic outcomes (correctness, truth) needs to be eliminated from the epistemic justification of democracy. I also disagree that the introduction of experts is, without exception, impossible to consider democratic. Finally, I disagree that the epistemic justification of democracy should be reduced to democratic procedures (no matter how deliberative and fair they may be). Moreover, I would like to argue that Peter's proceduralist solution is a defence of political instrumentalism, which is an equally inappropriate solution of the authority dilemma as epistemic instrumentalism. In providing arguments for such a stance, I will rely on discussions about epistemic values in social context, recently elaborated in social epistemology.

Allow me a brief digression aimed to introduce the relevance of social epistemology for debates about the epistemic justification of democracy. Social epistemology is a sub-discipline of epistemology which deals with the processes of belief formation, retention and revision of an individual epistemic agent conducted within social interaction. It also deals with the epistemic properties of groups, institutions and social systems (Goldman 1987, 1999, 2010). The epistemic features of democracy, such as its epistemic justification, are consequently also issues elaborated by social epistemology. Social epistemology assumes a certain interdisciplinary philosophical perspective that incorporates epistemology, philosophy of politics, ethics and social philosophy. In the words of one of the most prominent founders of social philosophy, Alvin Goldman, social epistemology is applied epistemology (Goldman 2010) or, using my own phrasing, 'real-world epistemology' (Prijić-Samaržija 2016).

It is important to note here that traditional epistemology makes no reference to practical cognitive issues within the real social world. Its focus was on the acquisition of knowledge in idealized circumstances: individual epistemic agents are perceived as persons of unlimited logical competences, asocial beings isolated from any socio-political context. Truth and rationality are detached from social power or any political dimension of belief formation. The instrumentalist approaches, which Peter continuously relies on, also assume this particular traditional approach to epistemic values. However, these traditional approaches are opposed by the influential reductionist perspective that has been promoted by contemporary movements such as postmodernism, social constructivism, sociology of knowledge and cultural

studies, and which stresses the social aspect of knowing (Rorty 1979, Barnes and Bloor 1982, Foucault 1980, 1991). The reductionist approach proclaimed the death of epistemology, or, more precisely, the traditional epistemic concepts of truth, rationality, justification and so on. Following their claim that beliefs are mere social constructions of power, epistemic investigations need to be reduced exclusively to the deconstruction of beliefs to the social relations of power. ‘Truly’ social epistemology, as the third approach, is positioned somewhere between traditionalist and reductionist extremes (Fricker 1998, 2007). It assumes a social situatedness of knowledge (congruent with the reductionist approach) while maintaining the central epistemic values of traditional epistemology such as truth, rationality, justification or problem-solving (reminiscent of the traditionalists). Epistemic agents form, retain and revise beliefs/judgments/decisions under social influences, but they still need to be evaluated as more-or-less truth-conducive, rational, justified, epistemically successful in problem-solving or like. Decisions are perceived as the product of a more-or-less fair decision making process, but, nevertheless, they also need to be evaluated as more-or-less justified, rational, correct or like.

This brief lesson in social epistemology is useful primarily for the sake of positioning Peter’s proceduralist proposal about the epistemic value of correctness or truth. It is clear that proceduralism appeals to the reductionist stance about truth or correctness. More precisely, in the debate about democratic decision-making situations, Peter’s proceduralism assumes a reductionist approach as she rejects that epistemic value rests in the epistemic outcome, or that there are any valuable and objective epistemic standards (such as correctness or truth) that are independent of the procedure. Moreover, we can label her assumption that epistemic value cannot lie in the true outcome as a certain form of epistemic revisionism⁴ due to the complete elimination of fundamental epistemic values (instead of just being relativized or positioned in a sceptical scenario).

However, when trying to position Peter’s stance within the framework of social epistemology, we should not neglect her distinction between situations in which there are third-person authorities and situations in which there are not. Peter does not exclude the relevance of epistemic value of truth in certain situations, but she is suspicious about this value within the realm of politics – an area in which there are no experts. Keeping this in our minds, we have to articulate her position as epistemic

4 Goldman makes a distinction between three approaches to exploring the social dimension of acquiring knowledge: the first is limited to previously mentioned topics within (individual) epistemology that engage the social dimension in a more or less explicit way (*preservationism*), the second expands the realm of social epistemology to include new interdisciplinary areas (*expansionism*) and the third can hardly be considered a legitimate approach to social epistemology as it refutes the fundamental traditional epistemic values (*revisionism*), (Goldman 2010).

revisionism or reductionism only in the domain of political decision-making processes. Consequently, we need to restate our qualification: by claiming that the entire epistemic value of a democratic decision-making process is within a fair and mutually accountable procedure, Peter accepts the reductionist epistemic approach exclusively to the epistemic justification of democracy, rejecting the core assumptions of (both traditional and truly social) epistemology. In her epistemic justification of democracy, traditional epistemic values are replaced with a form of 'democratic procedural epistemic norms'. According to Peter, an epistemically valuable decision is a social fabrication, or the construction of a fair and mutually accountable deliberation process. There are no procedure-free norms of rationality, justification, validity and truth, as epistemic value lies entirely in the fairness of the procedures. In other words, the epistemic value of a decision is completely reduced to the political/democratic value of the procedure that generated that particular decision. It is worth to be mention that Peter does not reduce general epistemic task to the elaboration of the social roots of a decision or on the analysis of the relations of power inherent to the decision-making procedure. She preserves the normative component of epistemic evaluation, that is rejected within reductionist approach. Socially unjust or politically unfair deliberations construct epistemically non-valuable beliefs. Not every construct (belief, decision) of deliberation is epistemic outcome that we only need to register, only constructs derived from fair, inclusive and mutually accountable democratic deliberation can be considered valuable.

In spite of this important aspect of Peter's stance, she nevertheless utilizes the political instead of the epistemic evaluation of decisions in the situation in which there are no third person authorities. Consequently, such a position is just a form of political instrumentalism. Peter's epistemic justification of democracy is not a truly epistemic defence of democratic decision-making outcomes, but rather a defence of political constructivism, formed on the basis of a seriously revised version of epistemology, making her comparable to those who have declared the death of epistemology (in this domain of political decision-making processes). Peter claims that epistemic instrumentalism solves the authority dilemma by reducing democratic values to epistemic values. She, justifiably, criticised such a stance. On the other hand, Peter's proceduralism solves the authority dilemma by reducing epistemic value to democratic/political value. Proceduralism sacrifices the epistemic value of decisions to their political value. Peter's alternative epistemic defence of democracy, which is affected by the authority dilemma, fails to solve this task in a manner similar to the failure of epistemic instrumentalism.

Finally, from the perspective of social epistemology, we can also detect a possible inconsistency. Since such a reductivist epistemic approach is not assumed in situations in which there are third-person authorities, we now have two kinds of epistemological approaches: traditional, for all situations in which there are third-

person authorities, and reductionist, for situations in which there are no third-person authorities. In other words, the epistemic value in some decision-making situations is truth and correctness, but not in others. Even if we could accept her *political* explanation that the epistemic value of truth entails a democratically inappropriate role of experts, we still need an *epistemic* explanation of what makes a democratic deliberation that particular kind of epistemic situation in which a correct outcome is not considered indispensable. She said that democratic deliberation is exceptional because there are no third-person authorities and the epistemic value of truth/correctness is not relevant. If truth/correctness is not problematic in some other discussions, what aspect of this particular kind of deliberation suffices to make us epistemically doubtful about the acquisition of truth? Aside from the politically doubtful role of experts, what is the epistemic reason to exclude the expertise in these deliberation processes? While reductionists reject truth in general, regardless of the situation, Peter develops a kind of dualistic position regarding the epistemic value of truth. Namely, her political instrumentalism does not offer an *epistemic* reason for the rejection of epistemic value of correctness or truth in deliberations in politics, assuming that the political rationale warrants priority.

HYBRID MODEL

Peter correctly emphasises the fact that the values of democracy and epistemic values can be conflicted: political unfairness can generate epistemic success, but, at the same time, political fairness can generate epistemic culpability. Should we conclude that we need to reject either one or the other, as suggested by the authority dilemma or assume either epistemic or political instrumentalism?

The most commonly discussed cases of political fairness producing epistemic culpability are affirmative action programs. For instance, affirmative action programs of quotas for Afro-Americans at American universities or for women in parliaments are criticized as epistemically unjustified as they can discriminate epistemically more deserving people who lose their deserved positions and, therefore, impose upon them epistemic and ethical/political (economic, educational, etc.) injustice. On the other side, there are situations in which epistemic benefits produce political unfairness, such as the examples of expertism or epistemic paternalism. Since experts are, comparatively, the best guides to truth (or at least to avoiding false beliefs), trusting experts usually results in justified beliefs. However, expertism, in addition to other kinds of epistemic paternalism, is usually seen as anti-democratic due to various reasons (Estlund 2003, 2008, Peter 2008, Kitcher, 2011).

Striving to equally appreciate democratic and epistemic values, we should justify neither epistemic sub-optimality which lead to political fairness nor epistemic

benefits which generate or assume political unfairness. As we have already mentioned above, the veritistic model, responds to the so-called standard approach to epistemic justification of democracy in stressing the importance of epistemic outcomes. According to this model, epistemic success is the sole necessary condition for approval, making it unacceptable to sacrifice epistemic goals in order to achieve political fairness. On the other side, sacrificing political fairness for the sake of epistemic success can be justified in certain cases. As we have previously seen, this model generates epistemic instrumentalism on the basis of the traditional approach to epistemic values. In the veritistic model, while affirmative action programs are never justified, some forms of expertism or epistemic paternalism could be considered just. The second paradigm is the proceduralist model that focuses primarily on political fairness. As political fairness is necessary for approval, it is acceptable to sacrifice epistemic success in order to insure political fairness. A situation in which political unfairness is conducive to epistemic success is completely unacceptable. We have also seen that proceduralism leads to political instrumentalism based on the reductivist or revisionist approach to epistemic values. In the proceduralist model, while affirmative action programs could be justified, no form of expertism or epistemic paternalism could ever be considered just.

However, I would like to plead here for a certain hybrid model. While veritism and proceduralism make clear value priorities regardless of the situation in question, deducing their assessment from the principled choice provided by the authority dilemma, the hybrid model insists on the specific assessment of both political and epistemic outcomes in real situations, going as far as to plead for certain 'trade-off' procedures. The hybrid model, on the basis of truly social epistemology, emphasises the necessary harmonization of epistemic and political values within a concrete real-world context. In the case of affirmative action, instead of simply deducing its critique or apology from the principles of veritism or proceduralism, we need a more comprehensive analysis of the concrete and long-term epistemic and political outcomes. Namely, the actions which may result in an instantaneous epistemically sub-optimal outcome can be justified if there is reasonable probability that they will produce better epistemic results within a longer period. Programs of affirmative action can slow down or reduce the possible or direct epistemic outcome but, at the same time, can be epistemically more valuable as long as they are likely to improve the long-term epistemic capacities of producing correct outcomes. Moreover, the fact that these programs preserve and insure fairness creates a situation in which both values are properly harmonized. So, the hybrid model can justify affirmative action programs, as long as we assume the epistemic values of truth or correctness. Hybrid model deals with the question of the role of experts in the democratic decision-making process in a similar manner, seeking for a specific harmonization of values. In the particular case of expertism, we could attempt to harmonize the epistemic and

the political by introducing a division of epistemic labour. A good example has been offered by Thomas Christiano or Philip Kitcher. Decisions about social/political priorities need to be left to citizens, but decisions about the methods of attaining these goals ought to be left to experts (Christiano 2012). In deliberating, decisions about the nature of the important issues can be tackled by citizens, while experts can contribute through various forms of participation (tutorials, supervision, education, representation of the weak or un-present, etc.), (Kitcher 2011). The democratic desiderata can be preserved by the *qualified* deference of citizens to experts. Trust in experts needs to be based on relevant evidence/rationale affirming the experts' trustworthiness, and on democratic mechanisms of attaining consensus about the experts' trustworthiness (Prijic-Samaržija 2016). Trust in epistemic authorities thus in no way necessarily violates both the epistemic and the political autonomy of each citizen, but appears to be rational and grounded on democratic principles (Zagzebski 2012).

The harmonization of values in the hybrid model tends to achieve the optimum balance of both epistemic and political values in each particular situation (not the abstract and absolute political or epistemic values in all possible situations). 'Trade-off' scenarios assume the sacrifice of absolute values of either truth or fairness for the sake of the hybrid values, or, differently worded, for the best possible balance of both epistemic and political values. Unqualified epistemic paternalism of experts cannot be justified in any 'trade-off' scenario: there is no epistemic benefit that can be justified by such a blatant example of a non-democratic procedure. At the same time the unqualified rejection of the role of experts cannot be justified: there is no real political benefit that needs to be grounded on the rejection of the epistemic value of correct or true outcomes.

While veritism relies on traditionalism and proceduralism rests on reductionism, the hybrid model assumes the stance of truly social epistemology (Fricker 1998). Within the hybrid model, normativity is disconnected from the concept of the apolitical value of truth and is instead bound to the idea that the processes of forming true beliefs are socially situated. Consequently, contrary to both traditionalism and reductivism, the hybrid model searches for true-belief formation processes that are reliably democratic in nature.

REASONABLE DISAGREEMENTS AND THE PROCEDURALISM

Peter finds the foundation of her thesis that correctness/truth need not be the desirable epistemic value in the epistemology of disagreement, or, more precisely, in the 'opacity stance' presented by prominent authors who defend reasonable disagreement (Sosa 2010, Goldman 2010, Peter 2013a, 2013b). The epistemology of

disagreement shows that, in certain circumstances of persistent disagreement between two parties/peers (in which there is no third-person authority which can resolve the disagreement), the epistemic agents have a reason to engage in deliberation with each other, adjust their beliefs in relation to each other and, finally, stay in reasonable disagreement. Peter holds that the existence of justified reasonable disagreement (in which both sides hold onto their conflicted beliefs) shows that the procedure of mutual accountability is epistemically valuable procedure *per se* and that epistemic value thus does not lie in the procedure-independent correct outcome.⁵

Firstly, it has to be mentioned here that the defence of reasonable disagreement within debates in epistemology of disagreement come, without exception, from authors that, unlike Peter, prefer the traditional approach to epistemology which undoubtedly portray truth as the central and general epistemic value. The debates within epistemology of disagreement are focused on the particular problem of resolving situations in which the desirable correct or true outcome is impossible to attain. Offering reasonable disagreement as the only solution, no one taking part in the debate would want to defend any substitution for truth. On the contrary, the participants would unanimously try to divulge an appropriate solution or explanation, given that it is not possible to attain an outcome that can be correct at this particular point in the discussion.

⁵ In *Democratic Legitimacy* (2008), Fabienne Peter had defended strict epistemic proceduralism, but later (2013a, 2013b) chose to opt for a more balanced stance, stressing that epistemic value cannot be fully reduced to the truthfulness/correctness of the results. She creatively based her softened stance on discussions pertaining to reasonable disagreements, an issue which has been continuously gaining momentum. Epistemological debates about disagreement are predominantly focused on the question of whether participants in a discussion with access to the same evidence (assuming that they are at comparable levels of expertise) can ever justifiably hold different stances. On one hand, certain philosophers clam that reasonable disagreement between peers who share all evidence cannot be possible, as either only one is right or both ought to suspend their beliefs (Christensen 2007, Elga 2007, 2010, Feldman 2007). On the other hand, others hold that there is a variety of reasons allowing for reasonable disagreement, with particular importance being attributed to the fact that two experts can never perceive the same evidence in entirely identical ways – it could be they did not have access to it at the same time or failed to perceive it as equally relevant. It is also possible that the evidence is simply interpreted differently in terms of different systems or knowledge or that the experts utilize different epistemic norms for legitimizing the data (Sosa 2010, Goldman 2010). Peter is particular to Sosa's and Goldman's stance about the possibility of reasonable disagreement, a standpoint known as the *Opacity View*. According to Peter, the very possibility of reasonable disagreement illustrates that it is possible to simultaneously deal with different, yet epistemically high-quality stances, regardless of being unable to assume that both of them are true/correct, as two different stances can never be equally true/correct. She concludes that the truthfulness of the outcome of a discussion *is* epistemically valuable, but maintains her stance that epistemic value cannot be decided without taking into account the epistemic value of the procedure used to reach the decision (Peter 2013a, Peter 2013b). Now, we can see that she offers additional explanations of her viewpoint, claiming that situations lacking a third-person authority capable of resolving the disagreement prove that the epistemic value of a true outcome can be substituted by the epistemic value of mutual respect (Peter 2016).

Secondly, we need to register that the situations of persistent disagreement are always perceived as clear cases of epistemic dissonance, rather than as a desirable epistemic solution (Zagzebski 2012). Adjustments and reasonable disagreements are sub-optimal epistemic solutions in situations in which accurate beliefs are not possible to attain (yet). The mutual accountability contained in the adjustment practices or in the reasonable disagreement itself is not primarily the demonstration of the epistemic values of fairness (that are dissociated from correct outcomes). This epistemic ‘tolerance’ and ‘pluralism’ doesn’t arise from the fact that both parties accept that there is no correct epistemic outcome or that the shared evidence permits different beliefs, but from the fact that *at this very moment* the shared evidence is not sufficient to attain a desirable common epistemic outcome (as exemplified by the Equal Weight View or the Steadfast view) or from the fact that *principally* all relevant evidence cannot be fully accessed and shared by both parties (Opacity view).

So, the existence and justification of reasonable disagreement neither prove nor illustrate the existence of situations in which the epistemic value of attaining correct or true outcomes can be rejected or replaced by the epistemic value of mutual accountability. On the contrary, it is based on the assumption that truth is the ultimate epistemic value – but that there are situations in which an agreement is (for different reasons) not possible to attain. It is fundamentally different from Peter’s proceduralist claim that in all situations lacking third-person authorities who can solve the disagreement, we ought to reject the value of truth and replace it with some other epistemic value (such as mutual accountability).

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DEMOCRACY, EPISTEMIC VALUE, AND POLITICAL EQUALITY: A NEW MODEL OF EPISTEMIC PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY*

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ABSTRACT

Participatory democracy is better off with a serious consideration of epistemic instrumental value and political equality. First, I argue that democracy is justified, in part, on its epistemic instrumental value. I also contend that the need to accommodate the epistemic value with the principle of equal political participation is only compatible with a standard of epistemic modesty which applies at the collective level, and not at the level of individual participation. Second, I explore the epistemic objections to direct democracy (as practiced in countries such as Switzerland and Uruguay), and argue that only a new model of participatory democracy would be consistent with the epistemic modesty standard required by my account of legitimacy. Third, I propose a set of institutions that have the aim of fostering, in a structural way, autonomous, informed, and public-oriented citizen participation. I contend that those institutions delineate a new model of epistemic participatory democracy. Finally, conclusions are presented.

KEYWORDS

Epistemic participatory democracy, citizen-initiated direct democracy, democratic innovations, epistemic modesty, democratic legitimacy

DEMOCRACY AND EPISTEMIC VALUE

When we ask whether democracy has an epistemic dimension, the question of how a democratic system manages the acquisition of knowledge emerges. *Knowledge*, here, will be considered as a justified true belief which is not caused by chance, and democracy will be understood as the equal allocation of voting rights to all adult citizens for collective decision-making. There are at least two general versions of the epistemic

conception of democracy. The first version is a purely epistemic conception. In this conception, the legitimacy of democracy is justified by its outcomes: it is argued that democracy instrumentally performs better than any other form of government or regime (Arneson, 2004). The second is a mixed conception: democracy is justified because it has good epistemic virtues in the long term and also because it honors procedural values such as equal treatment in the allocation of political rights and values such as freedom of choice and freedom of expression. In this second conception, the equal allocation of political rights is justified both by its epistemic virtues and because it honors the equal dignity and autonomy of citizens. Both dimensions are inherent and inseparable from the legitimacy of democracy.

The purely epistemic conception does not stand scrutiny. The legitimacy of a democratic regime cannot be grounded *only* in its epistemic value. If only the achievement of the best decision matters, or the best set of outcomes, then democracy would not be the best instrumental procedure, but the government of experts (or *epistocracy*, as Estlund famously labeled it). This is so because grounding legitimacy exclusively in the epistemic force of a political regime necessarily has two consequences. First, the epistemic standard is raised to the highest level: what is aimed for is the best conceivable outcome, not a good enough one. Second, the epistemic standard applies to individual participants and not only to collective decisions. These two consequences imply that if we could disenfranchise completely ignorant or morally-bject people, then the system would be wiser than one fully inclusive. If the task is to ensure the maximum probability of achieving the “best decision” or set of outcomes, then democracy would not be justified, since it is always possible to achieve better outcomes by excluding either fully ignorant or morally-depraved voters (Brennan, 2012b). The epistemic dimension alone has, therefore, an epistocratic drift.

Hélène Landemore (2013) explicitly defends a mixed conception, but questions the epistocratic drift of the epistemic dimension. She has argued that a fully inclusive procedure tends to reach better decisions in the long run than any alternative system of government. She grounds her argument on two theorems: the “diversity trumps ability” theorem (Hong and Page, 2001; 2004), which deals with the ability to find solutions to practical problems; and the “miracle of aggregation” or the “diversity prediction theorem,” which deals with empirical predictions (Hong and Page, 2012). In the first theorem, Hong and Page (2004) show that when the task is to solve a common practical problem, groups of people with

poorer average cognitive ability, but with greater cognitive diversity (in terms of perspectives and heuristic approaches), perform better than groups of people with a higher average cognitive ability but less cognitive diversity. The second theorem shows that larger groups whose members have diverse predictive models perform better than groups whose members have more homogeneous predictive heuristics. Since numbers are correlated with cognitive diversity, contends Landemore, an inclusive democratic procedure is the better choice.

The first theorem assumes a set of assumptions that are hard to extrapolate to democracy. First, it is unclear how the theorem justifies the participation of all on an equal footing –typical of democracy- rather than a system where experts listen to a large and cognitive diverse group of people. The “diversity trumps ability” theorem involves people with different cognitive perspectives and heuristics who share the same practical purpose and reach an innovative solution by gradual escalation (it is therefore assumed that participants communicate with each other). The achieved solution by gradual escalation is a kind of “Eureka” solution. But this model, hypothetically, can be implemented either by a democratic procedure, either by an expert system with consultation procedures, because the important thing in the model is not *who* makes the final decision, but *how* they get to it. Including more and more advisory participants is not exactly identical to deepening democracy.

There is also a second problem. One of the conditions of the theorem is that all participants “*are smart enough.*” But this raises the following question: what does it mean to be smart *enough*? The theorem does not specify a minimum threshold of intelligence, and Landemore assumes, perhaps for epistemic charity, that all people are located beyond that threshold. But charity is appropriate -or at least not so uncontroversial- for the solution of moral conflicts, not for the solution of complex technical tasks, the ones that are involved in the theorem. If the task is difficult and complex, introducing more and more people with unsophisticated but differentiated cognitive skills will not improve the performance of the group, no matter how diverse they are.

With the miracle of aggregation -or diversity prediction theorem- something similar happens. The theorem does not assert, without further specification, that it is always better to have larger and cognitive diverse groups in order to make better predictions. The theorem does not prove

that individual ability has no relevance in predictions, and that the prediction of the crowd is “always” more accurate than the one made by an individual or a group of experts. According to the theorem, the performance of the crowd is a function of individual ability *and* predictive diversity. And it can happen, in fact, that an individual or a subgroup guesses systematically better predictions than the crowd, since knowledge is not normally distributed in the crowd. The model itself doesn’t justify equal voting rights typical of democracy, because if one could discern those with the most accurate predictive models, then the crowd would be more successful under a scheme of aggregation in which the most competent have a higher weight than the less competent.

In short, the aim of anchoring the legitimacy of democracy *only* in the epistemic value of the procedure does not have enough support: beneath the clefts of the argumentative plot lurks the government of experts. Democratic legitimacy cannot be justified solely on the epistemic value of the procedure; the epistemic value must necessarily be modest (that is, it should aim, with a probability better than random, to achieve *enough good* decisions in the long run, even if they are not the best ones); and that standard of epistemic modesty is attributable to the collective level, not to the level of individual performance.

David Estlund (2008) also advocates a mixed conception of democratic legitimacy, but -like Landemore- also opposes the idea that the epistemic dimension itself has an epistocratic drift. His argument, however, is a bit more sophisticated. According to Estlund, the epistemic dimension of the procedure has priority over the value of equal treatment in political participation. Political equality (labeled “procedural fairness”), says Estlund, has only an *occasional* value: it appears where it is not possible to reach an agreement between reasonable people on the best outcome. Since any attempt to single out who are the experts raises reasonable objections, the justification of the political regime must necessarily rest, by default, on the value of equality of treatment, which displays equal voting rights for all adults. Democracy collapses therefore in an inclusive procedure because it is not possible to reach a reasonable agreement on who are the wise or the experts. This is the core of Estlund’s argument.

Now, if the government of experts is not justifiable because it cannot be subject to a reasonable agreement, we still might wonder whether the disenfranchisement of the unreasonable could be justified. Why not exclude those who defend slavery, terrorism, or embrace religious intolerance? Or, in a less radical –and widespread- way, why not suppress the voting rights of those who have committed serious crimes, or those

who lack basic intellectual skills (as children, or the insane)? Nothing in the argument of reasonableness opposes these exclusions. It is true that a test or exam of reasonableness would face huge practical obstacles in defining exactly where the line between the reasonable and the unreasonable lies, and how to track sincere preferences or judgments, given that most people will strategically conceal their true preferences. The technical hurdles of implementation would eventually exclude many reasonable people and enable many of the unreasonable, who would lie in their responses just to have more political power. However, these practical hindrances would not suffice to show that the equal allocation of rights – typical of democracy – would be acceptable for reasonable people. Only it would show that reasonable people will face hard barriers in choosing between a) a system that gives equal rights to every adult – even unreasonable ones – and b) a system that defines objective criteria for disenfranchising the unreasonable, because both schemes are subject to reasonable objections. And in the absence of uncontroversial evidence, it is always possible to argue that the epistemic damage caused by a democratic regime is greater than the one caused by a test of reasonableness (Brennan, 2012b).

Jason Brennan is right, therefore, in arguing that the epistemic dimension alone necessarily collapses in a government of experts. Neither Landemore nor Estlund succeed in their attempt to defeat the epistocratic drift on exclusively epistemic grounds. Democracy must necessarily rest also in the value of equal political participation, which is a source of value in itself and poses limits to the slope leading to epistocracy. However, once we introduce procedural equality in the formula, we are bound to moderate the epistemic commitment to a *satisficing* one (Simon, 1956): it is not necessary to reach the best set of outcomes: enough good decisions or outcomes would be an acceptable threshold. This also implies that the epistemic value required for achieving legitimacy only needs to reach a modest epistemic value “at the collective level”, regardless of how many people honor their individual epistemic duties at every voting opportunity.

It is useful to consider this possibility with an equivalent example that involves moral duties – instead of epistemic ones. Suppose an ambulance transporting a critically ill patient is stranded by a wrong maneuver of his driver, in a ditch in front of a bar. At the door of the bar, there are many people smoking and talking, and no one bothers to help release the

ambulance, although they are aware (they can hear the driver's shouts) that the patient's life is at risk. Yet, no one would be able to lift the ambulance alone; to release the ambulance the help of several people is needed. Suppose that people in the bar, at least, have the individual duty to show a willingness to cooperate, such that it signals a predisposition that could prompt the cooperation of others. Suppose, then, that all people have, at least, an individual duty to show a willingness to contribute, and a moral duty to help when others also show up or signal their good will. Assuming that the ambulance is so heavy that lifting it necessarily requires the help of "all" who are at the door of the bar, it can happen that some people cooperate while others not. If this happens, the outcome is a collective failure: none (or very few) cooperate and therefore the ambulance is not released and the patient ends up dying. A classic philosophical problem arises: no individual is fully responsible for the collective outcome, and from the standpoint of moral philosophy, it is still doubtful that individuals are responsible at all, since the individual duty to cooperate only appears if others cooperate.

For those who defend epistocracy or the government experts, it is natural to think that the epistemic track of democracy works equivalently to this example. Instead of a moral failure, the democratic regime would display an epistemic failure: voters would have incentives to free-ride in their epistemic duties and vote without adequate information (on epistemic free-riding see List and Pettit, 2004 and Elster, 2010). Epistemic failure is possible under the current democratic arrangements, as shown by the election of Donald Trump. However, the analogy may not be so accurate under different –and more democratic– institutions, as the ones I will develop below. The most appropriate way to put the example under suitable democratic arrangements is that of an ambulance, stranded in front of a bar, which requires the help of a certain number of people (but not all) to be lifted. Everyone has a duty to show up and be willing to cooperate, but if only some of them help, the ambulance will end up being released. The non-compliance by some people of the duty to show up and help would not be enough to stop the release of the ambulance. The free-riding behavior of some people is morally reprehensible, but despite this, we still get a morally acceptable outcome. I believe that the analogy can be extrapolated to epistemic cases, in particular, with the epistemic individual duties involved in a proper democratic regime. Although some people are grossly incompetent and fail to comply with the moral duty to "vote with enough information," a proper democratic regime can keep achieving good decisions or outcomes if enough people contribute with

their share of cognitive effort in the voting process and others take advantage of that effort. Thus, democracy can continue to display a modest epistemic value at the collective level although, at the individual level, many people breach their epistemic duties.

For sure there is a threshold beyond which the aggregation of ignorant votes would eventually frustrate the collective commitment to achieving sufficiently good decisions, just as the ambulance would not be released if the number of people who decide to help is not enough. I don't deny this possibility. But I contend that the equal allocation of voting rights, under the set of institutions proposed in this paper, which encourage the emergence of autonomous, well-informed, and public-oriented preferences, is far from that threshold. If we can preach, with a probability better than random, the achievement of good enough decisions at the collective level, then the procedure must be accepted, not for purely epistemic reasons, but for a host of reasons. We must also accommodate other values, such as equal dignity and freedom of choice, which put limits on the government of experts or epistocracy.

EPISTEMIC MODESTY AND PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY: FRIENDS OR ENEMIES?

Once we recognize that the legitimacy of democracy has an epistemic dimension that must be accommodated with equal political participation, a practical question emerges: under what specific institutions can democracy reach the threshold of epistemic modesty?

Most epistemic conceptions of democracy are reluctant to include as a necessary element of democratic legitimacy the mechanisms of direct democracy initiated from below, in the form of popular citizen initiatives. This reluctance is understandable for several reasons. First, surveys consistently show information poverty of the average voter, regardless of the context. Secondly, the way countries regulate institutions of direct democracy varies a great deal, and the few countries in the world that have citizen initiatives regulate them in idiosyncratic terms. To postulate a normative model for the rest of the world from political systems that exhibit very few countries with very different formats may be too demanding and perhaps a little extravagant. And thirdly, there is general agreement, of a practical nature, that political representation is a

necessary element of any democratic political regime: while a mass society cannot function without representative government schemes (at least for bureaucratic decision-making), a mass society can function perfectly well without direct democracy mechanisms. This consensus amounts to a kind of incompletely theorized agreement (Sunstein, 1999) that puts political representation in a privileged site from a pragmatic point of view. However, this pragmatic primacy quickly fuels the belief that political representation is also a sufficient condition of democratic legitimacy.

In this section I want to challenge the common belief that political representation is a *sufficient* element of democratic legitimacy. I want to argue that the principle of equal political participation that partly justifies the legitimacy of democracy demands citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy with innovations I will develop further. And even more: I want to argue that, only with this set of institutions, democracy would be consistent with the parameter of epistemic modesty demanded by a mixed account of legitimacy. I will call “epistemic participatory democracy” this non-ideal model I want to single out as an intermediate alternative to pure representative democracy and classical forms of participatory democracy. But before proceeding to delineate the institutions of this new model, I want to explain why the citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy, in countries that accept them, are faulty or out of order.

Mechanisms “from below”: Switzerland and Uruguay

There are two institutions of citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy (or direct democracy “from below”): a) the citizen initiative, through which a number of citizens can demand to submit to popular vote a legislative bill or a constitutional amendment, and b) the abrogative referendum (or “reactive” referendums, or referendums “against” legal statutes), through which a number of citizens can demand that the government submit to popular vote a legal statute that has been approved by the Legislature and promulgated by the Executive (or an executive order issued by the Executive).

In Switzerland, there are two instruments of citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy: the abrogative referendum and the other is the popular initiative. The abrogative referendum is a defensive weapon through which the citizenry can block a legal statute passed by the parliament that generates widespread opposition or controversy. Thus, Article 141 of the Swiss Constitution stipulates that within a hundred days

after the publication of the statute in the official gazette, if fifty thousand signatures are obtained, the statute has to be put to a popular vote. Since 2000, the government has 40 days (since the signatures are certified) to submit it to a popular vote (Schwartz et. al., 2011). Only the budget law cannot be attacked by this reactive mechanism (Altman, 2008).

The abrogative referendum transforms the dynamic of communication between representatives and citizens. Indeed, the threat that the citizenry could issue a reactive referendum compels parliamentary groups to approve moderate laws in order to avoid anyone being sufficiently annoyed to collect fifty thousand signatures. In fact, parliamentarians in Switzerland annually process hundreds of laws and over the course of a year, only two or three laws ever go to a popular vote. Thanks to this tool, people can avoid strategic manipulation of the agenda and veto any proposals that do not have popular support. Since laws are always passed with the latent threat of a possible referendum, legislators are often pressed to “cross” the borders of their partisan group and search for specific alliances with other parties or groups of civil society, thus promoting increased communication between the legislature and the public.

Uruguay has a similar instrument, but to activate a referendum there, 25% of signatures are required. The process of gathering signatures is implemented in two stages: in a first stage, 2% of registered voters present the proposal (within the 50 days after a legal statute or a decree comes into force). Once the proposal is received, the proponents of the proposal have 150 days to collect the signatures of 25% of voters (roughly equivalent to 500,000 people). On one-day a “pre-referendum” is held, where voters cast their “signature” or approval for the proposal. If 25% of signatures are gathered, then a referendum will be held within 120 days. Unlike the Swiss case, where the abrogative referendum can be used to veto tax laws (but not the budget law), the abrogative referendum in Uruguay cannot be used to veto tax laws nor laws that were approved under the President’s exclusive prerogative of legislative initiative (this includes the budget law).

Then we have the so-called popular or citizen initiatives, through which citizens can put forward a bill or a constitutional amendment. If the Legislature rejects it or doesn’t consider it within a certain period of time, the bill or the constitutional amendment is subjected to popular vote. In Switzerland, the popular initiative is only recognized at the federal level

for constitutional amendments (total or partial). Legal citizen initiatives are not permitted at the federal level. At the cantonal level, however, citizens can promote the popular initiative for new cantonal laws. This system generates, in practice, some dysfunctions because, at the federal level, people may still issue legislative proposals for partial modification of the constitution through popular initiatives, leading to a situation in which many policy proposals that could be legislated are introduced into the Constitution, turning it into a code of precise rules rather than a charter of abstract principles.

According to Article 139 of the Swiss Constitution, the citizenry needs to collect 100,000 signatures in order to propose a specific constitutional amendment. The Parliament receives the proposal, analyzes its validity, and once it is confirmed, the Parliament may either reject it, accept it, or omit considering it. Unity of subject matter is required, which means that an initiative must not include several different proposals. The purpose of this is to ensure that the clear will of the people can be expressed: without a single subject, the electorate might accept something with which they do not agree. Since 2000, some content limitations also exist: binding provisions of international treaties cannot be subjected to citizen-initiated referendums. If Parliament accepts the validity of the initiative, it must submit it to popular vote within 39 months (three years and three months). In addition to the popular initiative, the government may propose a counter proposal. The people, on the day of the vote, can say “yes” to the initiative and the counterproposal, can reject both, or can say “yes” to one and “no” to the other. As it is theoretically possible that both the citizen initiative and the counterproposal could be approved, people are asked what is called the “tiebreaker question,” in which they should answer which of the two proposals they prefer in the case both were approved (Ordás, 2012: 41). The initiative that receives an absolute majority of votes throughout the country *and* an absolute majority of votes in more than half of the cantons will come into force.

In Uruguay, unlike Switzerland, there is the citizen initiative for constitutional amendments and for legal amendments (regulated by legal statute 17,244, although it's not used). Unlike Switzerland, the number of signatures required for the first type of citizen initiative is 10% of voters (approximately 300,000 signatures), while the requirement for exercising the second is 25% (the signatures are collected as required by the abrogative referendum: 2 % of registered voters to put forward the initiative, a pre-referendum day held within a period of 150 days that wins 25% of signatures, and the referendum). The threshold for a legal popular

initiative is so demanding that the mechanism has become obsolete in practice (Lissidini, 2008: 40). As for the popular initiative for constitutional reform, once the collection of 10% of the signatures are certified, the Congress, in joint session, can make a counterproposal, which is subjected to a popular vote *with* the citizen's popular initiative. The referendum in this case is held concurrently with presidential elections. Finally, in Uruguay, there is a curious rule regarding citizen initiatives for constitutional amendments: voters can only vote "Yes." Those who wish to reject a proposal, must simply abstain from voting in the referendum. Those who vote "Yes" must represent an absolute majority of voters in the presidential election. In addition, voters must exceed 35% of the electoral roll (otherwise, the initiative is considered not approved). This system privileges the *statu quo* because voters who abstain for reasons of ignorance or uncertainty are counted as rejecting the initiative.

Epistemic objections against citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy

One of the most common objections against citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy underscores the lacking information of voters. In that vein, there are multiple surveys and studies that show the widespread ignorance of voters (see Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Bartels, 2008; Caplan, 2008; Somin, 2013). Apparently, it is a kind of *rational* ignorance: citizens have inadequate incentives to invest time in acquiring information and learning, since their votes have a minimal ability to influence the outcome (Downs, 1957). In the case of citizen-initiated referendums, there are two features that aggravate the situation (Cronin, 1989): the absence of political parties and the complexity of the proposals. The first feature implies that voters don't receive adequate "signals" or "indications" (heuristic cues), as they are usually brought in by political parties when public offices are at stake. This happens because most referendum campaigns are sponsored by special interest groups that are motivated by specific issues or commitments. These groups are dissolved once the referendum ends. Since the interests and commitments of these groups are less known to the citizenry than the ideology of political parties, the signals they provide are less informative and probably

less reliable for voters than party signals (Gerber and Lupia, 1999: 148). To complicate matters, the policy proposals sponsored by popular initiatives are generally long, technical, and complex.

Now, the argument that voters are incompetent on average must face several reasonable objections. First, the fact that the average voter exhibits a very poor level of knowledge on key aspects of the political system is not sufficient to prove that citizens are incompetent. For example, it may happen that a voter knows, say, 20 facts in order to base his or her vote on a specific issue. But the question to ask is whether the full knowledge of these facts is necessary to issue a qualified vote. If only a subset of facts is enough, then the voter doesn't need to be fully informed (Lupia, 1994). When citizens can rely on political party's public statements around the issue at stake in the popular initiative, then they might be able to vote with enough knowledge, even if they are not able to answer a technical quiz on the matter. And the testimony of others, under certain conditions, is a perfectly valid epistemic route to found a judgment (Coady, 1992). When there are clear public statements around the issue and people can discern which political party is for or against the proposal, voters may vote with adequate knowledge even if they don't know the details of the proposals (Lupia, 1994).

Another of the most common epistemic objections to direct democracy "from below" raises the issue of collective irrationalities. It is argued from that perspective that if citizens were to vote on each and every political decision, then the set of enacted policies would cease to be internally consistent. People would pay too much attention to each specific issue without analyzing how these issues are interrelated (ideologically and performatively) with other issues or dimensions of public policy or on other policies. Phillip Pettit (2001, 2006, 2008, 2012) has strongly criticized popular initiatives on this basis. Pettit offers the following scenario of proposals submitted to a referendum: 1) whether to maintain the current level of tax burden, 2) whether or not to increase spending on defense and armed forces, 3) whether or not to increase spending on education, and 4) whether to approve or not an austere budget. All people agree that if we adopt an austere budget and maintain the current tax burden, then we cannot increase spending on education and defense at the same time. We are bound to choose just one from the list of proposals. Suppose that three groups of people vote for these specific issues in this way:

Table 1. Discursive dilemma

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Voter	<i>Keep tax burden level</i>	<i>Raise defense spending</i>	<i>Raise education spending</i>	<i>Conclusion: approve an austere budget</i>
A	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
B	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
C	No (Raise tax burden)	Yes	Yes	No (raise spending)
Total	2 Yes 1 No	2 Yes 1 No	2 Yes 1 No	2 Yes 1 No

Source: Pettit, 2008.

This is an example of the famous discursive dilemma (or paradox Poisson/Vacca): a majority vote to maintain current levels of tax pressure, a majority vote to increase defense spending, a majority vote to increase the spending on education, and a majority vote to pass an austere budget. But the collective outcome is inconsistent with individual judgments (nobody prefers the outcome, nobody defends it). What is more problematic: the outcome is untenable in practice, since the budget is not enough to implement both public policies (education and defense spending). The lesson offered in this example, Pettit says, is that individual rationality is no guarantee of collective rationality under a system of popular initiatives.

Pettit acknowledges that the assemblies and councils of ministers may also incur in collective irrationalities, but the small-scale scenario, in which participants discuss with each other many proposals at the same time, seems to overcome it (Schwartz, 1977). In particular, the danger of collective irrationalities is supposed to be avoided because representatives can exchange proposals or negotiate strategically with each other. If, for example, the participant A tells B that she will not vote to increase defense spending if B votes for raising the tax burden, then voter A can end up – for strategic reasons- accepting a second-best collective agreement that leads to a higher tax burden with an increased education budget. Or you can ask A to vote to increase education spending (and not defense) in exchange for a vote in a future issue that is of great interest to A. This type of strategic arrangements is much more difficult in large populations, because it is very costly, when not impossible, to learn about the preferences of others and negotiate exchanges of votes among such large groups.

However, Pettit forgets that the voting method (simultaneous or sequential) and the character of the alternatives (if they are simple or complex) are two crucial aspects. Pettit ignores the possibility that people

may uphold preferences on complex alternatives (alternatives that have two or more connected issues). It is perfectly plausible that participants uphold preference's profiles with these eight complex alternatives:

Table 2. Staggered voting on complex

Table 2. Staggered voting on complex alternatives

	A	B	C
1º	YYN	YNY	NYY
2º	YNY	YYN	NYN
3º	NYY	NYY	NNY
4º	NYN	NNY	YYN
5º	NNY	NYN	YNY
6º	NNN	NNN	NNN
7º	YNN	YNN	YNN
8º	YYY	YYY	YYY

If participants go along issue by issue in a staggered manner, voting firstly on one issue, secondly on another, and so on, the process would never lead to three “Yes” answers (YYY, the collectively irrational outcome). If voters begin first with the question of whether or not to maintain the current tax burden, and then immediately after, vote for another second issue, and then for the last one, the collective result would be Yes, Yes, No. If they start with the third question (whether to increase spending on education or not), and then vote on separate moments the other two issues, the result would be Yes, No, Yes. And if they start voting on whether to increase spending on defense or not, and then vote for the other two issues in the same way, the result would be Yes, Yes, No.. If participants vote issue by issue taking into account previous results, complex alternatives will be discarded in the successive ballots that include losers in each issue. The shorter time period between the votes on the issues, the more likely it is that more voters would take into account the dependence between issues and it is less likely that inconsistent

policies would emerge. This means that collective irrationality depends only on the fact that participants vote simultaneously on the three interconnected issues (or vote in a staggered way but separated by long time periods, so they are less likely to perceive the links between each question).

Collective irrationalities are also hard to occur if voters are asked to rank all the complex alternatives from the highest to the lowest, in order of preference and apply voting methods with multiple alternatives (such as Condorcet, Borda, Kemeny, Nanson, etc.). In our example, a Yes, Yes, No result would be the Borda and Condorcet winner. It is true that if the issues are numerous, the number of complex alternatives would expand exponentially, making the evaluation of them very costly in cognitive terms. The conclusion of all these scenarios should be clear: if you wanted to vote for two related issues, the most reasonable way would be to a) generate complex alternatives with all possible combinations of the two issues so that voters could order them hierarchically, and apply any ranked voting method, or b) implement two sequenced votes in a very short time emphasizing the interconnectedness of both issues. The easiest solution, of course, is to always vote for a singular question with two simple alternatives and let the representatives figure out the other related issues.

The risk of the emergence of collective irrationalities should also be assessed in line with other parallel dangers that sometimes can also display representatives when they have the monopoly of agenda setting: a) a dynamic of superfluous political rhetoric, characterized with grandiloquent phrases without practical implications (or worse, characterized by hate and hostility towards opponents), and b) myopia and resistance to change when innovation comes from civil society. Perhaps a dose of incoherence or irrationality is the price we have to pay for fostering innovation and co-creation in public policy. We must not forget that the relevant political knowledge is widely distributed in society and that means we cannot anticipate from where social innovations will come. Therefore, the system must remain open to all influences. This implies that the government has a duty not only to consult others from outside and be permeated to various sources of information, but also has the duty to establish channels through which civil society can itself submit ideas and innovative proposals to a popular vote.

Another argument against citizen-initiated referendums highlights citizen apathy: ordinary citizens do not have the time or interest to participate in complex and technical matters. If the electoral base of support of public policy is very low, democratic legitimacy is undermined (Le Duc, 2006). For example, if a bill put forward by a small minority of society (e.g. 1% to 15%) is approved by majority vote by a minority of society (say, 30% of the electorate), it is always possible to argue that the policy is not backed by the majority of society¹.

One way to overcome this problem is to instantiate a hybrid system of democracy. Imagine a city council, with 10 councilors elected through a system of party lists under a proportional formula (e.g. D'Hont). For simplicity, we will consider that the relation between votes and seats is perfectly proportional. For example, there are 100 people, 60 vote for party A, and 40 vote for the party B. Consequently, the party A receives 6 seats, party B receives 4. Typically, *each seat is equivalent to one vote* in the council, *and every vote represents ten citizens*. Suppose now that an ordinary citizen, who voted for the party A, gathers ten signatures, which allows him in our example to pose a popular initiative. Suppose now that there is a system through which every citizen can ask for the “devolution” of their *share of political sovereignty*. We are supposing that the vote of a legislator equals ten citizens. So, if the share of ten percent of political sovereignty is given back to ten citizens, the vote of each councilor will no longer be one (1) but 0.9 (the result of subtracting ten percent from the whole value of political sovereignty in the hands of the council, and then distributing the remaining amount of political sovereignty on equal terms between councilors). The larger number of citizen voters will increasingly lessen the value of the councilor's votes. If all citizens vote, the vote of each councilor is void of value. Under such a system, we no longer need to worry about low voter turnout. From the point of view of democratic legitimacy, it is irrelevant how many people vote. If we believe that political representation is needed for ensuring a division of labor in society, then those who abstain from voting should be responsible of their

¹Evidence shows that participation indeed is low and ranges between 30 and 45 percent. Nicholson (2003) also shows that the level of attention around the issues to be decided, systematically fluctuate with the number of issues brought to a vote. All things being equal, increasing the number of issues generates lower levels of political information, and consequently greater voter fatigue. Consistent with these results, Jackman and Miller (2004) study the referenda in Switzerland during the period from 1879 to 2000, and show that the greater the number of questions put forward to the popular vote, the lower the turnout.

abstention: the consequence being that their voice and vote will be represented by elected representatives.

Finally, an important stream of authors who stand up for deliberative democracy argue that citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy are not up to the ideal that underpins the legitimacy of political decisions. Voting in referenda is “silent, anonymous and secret” (Fishkin, 2009: 79) and political communication in these scenarios is “mediated” by the elites (political and social). The most powerful voices have more opportunities (and money) to communicate their messages (Ackerman and Fishkin, 2002; Cohen and Fung, 2004). Now, Goodin and Niemeyer (2003; 2008) have studied the communication process and change of preferences in a deliberative poll in Australia. Briefly, they found that most of the changes in preferences among participants occurred in the first phase of the jury, that is, at the time when citizens were exposed to the information presented by experts. The deliberative stage between citizens did not cause major changes in attitudes and preferences of voters. This finding lead both authors to conclude that, rather than deliberating “face-to-face” with others, deliberating with oneself (which is merely a euphemism for individual thinking) and in the light of the information provided by experts, is what really makes a difference in promoting epistemically justified beliefs. I take these findings as proving that face-to-face deliberation with others, while convenient, is not the only route that leads to the acquisition of knowledge or -at least- epistemic justified beliefs. Since the views of experts can be communicated to a much wider audience than that involved in small groups (for example, through the mass media, or voter information guides), then we can seek to expand the scale of participation while trying to improve the quality of information behind a vote. An interesting solution in that vein is to use mini-publics in order to inform voters, as it has been done in the U.S. state of Oregon since 2009.

THE INSTITUTIONS OF EPISTEMIC PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

Democracy is justified, in part, on its epistemic value. The epistemic value applies at the collective level and must necessarily be modest

because we must accommodate the principle of equal political participation. This principle demands –this is my main point in the paper– citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy but of a different kind from the traditional ones. The system must be structurally designed to promote the emergence of autonomous, informed, and public-oriented citizen preferences. The rudiments of such a set of institutions that can achieve such goals is outlined in this last section.

A new regime of citizen vote

I put forward some reforms in the voting system, aimed at improving the quality of information and encouraging the emergence of voters' autonomous and public-oriented preferences. My proposal includes three elements, each of which can be distinguished from the others and applied in its own terms, although all of them together have an internal coherence: a) a voter's public oath, b) facultative voting with public turnout, and c) new types of votes.

a) Voter's public promise

I propose that citizens (or residents) voters, before casting the vote in elections or referendums, should pronounce publicly (in front of a public official) the following statement: “I *publicly promise to cast my vote in a reflective judgment* [on the proposals of the candidates] *and exercise my citizen power with responsibility.*” And just in case someone refuses to pronounce that promise, then the voter should publicly pronounce the following dictum: “*I refuse to deliver the promise on grounds of conscientious objection.*” If she/he refuses to recite any of the two statements, then she/he is not entitled to vote.

First of all, I must say that it is not a very innovative proposal in its fundamental aspects. The democratic Constitution of Vermont in 1777 (as far as I know, the first modern democratic constitution in history) contains a similar formula that still exists in that local state, although in Vermont, the promise is mandatory, with no exceptions. I propose to recover this institution, which symbolically reflects the idea that citizens, in whose heads sovereignty lies, should also exercise political power responsibly. It does not seem morally consistent to demand social responsibility of representatives and not to demand the same of citizens when they choose the former.

The content of the promise is extremely thin, and is correlative to the traditional public oath, pronounced by elected officials, to obey the

constitution (a current promise in contemporary democracies which, by the way, I also believe should ideally be subjected to an exception for reasons of freedom of conscience). It is a statement that the citizen (or permanent resident) must pronounce in each instance of political participation, especially when binding decisions are at stake. The promise begins enunciating the phrase “I promise publicly,” which designates precisely the fact that it is a promise, and that promise is made in public and for the public. The content bracketed “I affirm that” is contemplated only in the case of those who refuse to pledge it, considering that the promise involves embracing a double moral standard (in this case, the statement is turned into an act of assertion). The statement is followed by the phrase “*cast my vote in a reflective judgment*” which refers to the importance of reflective thinking on the merits of the proposals or candidates. This reflective feature, of course, is generic, and includes instances in which people “reason together” with other instances in which people carry out an exercise of personal reflective thinking before issuing the vote. The formula therefore does not prejudge about which of these two ways of reflective reasoning takes precedence, but discards all those visions that consider that epistemic reflection is not necessary in order to cast a vote.

The statement that refers to the reflective judgment follows the bracketed phrase “on the proposals of the candidates,” which is in brackets because it only applies when choosing representatives. This content attempts to highlight the moral importance of reasoning on the policy proposals put forward by the candidates, an element that is easily despised in times dominated by plebiscitary rhetoric and image. When the task is to vote on a referendum, the content in brackets disappears.

Finally, the promise closes with the statement “and to exercise my citizen power responsibly.” This content vindicates the importance of accountability in the exercise of citizen power, without giving further information about what that responsibility entails. It is extremely thin content, which does not exclude any reasonable view of what responsibility means towards others or the common good. “Responsibility” is interpreted in different ways by those espousing a reasonable view of politics and distributive justice, and all of those interpretations are included. Those promulgating an unreasonable view of politics, instead, believe that it is legitimate to exercise power without

reflective thinking or consideration of how policies can affect others. These latter views are discarded.

As I said, the public utterance of the promise is mandatory, but can be exempted if the voter makes a public declaration of conscientious objection. I believe that promises cannot be imposed by force, because it would take away all the epistemic value of the public statement. If you make a promise under threats of retaliation, the promise will no longer have moral force because one of the conditions for the validity of epistemic beliefs -which comes from Kant- is that it should be embraced with autonomy and in full possession of mental capacities.

b) Facultative voting with public turnout (*civic voting*)

There is a heated debate in political philosophy around the voluntary or compulsory character of the vote (Lever, 2009). Proponents of the facultative vote often argue that voting is a kind of trust, an act of confidence that society places on each citizen, which therefore should be exercised with responsibility. Voting without enough information, therefore, is an morally irresponsible act that should be avoided (Brennan, 2012b). On the other hand, advocates of compulsory voting argue that political participation has an intrinsic value that should be promoted. Others highlight that facultative voting displays a pattern of low and declining voting turnout, which calls into question the democratic legitimacy of the election results, while others provide evidence of the elitist bias of optional voting (the data indicates that more educated and higher-income people participate under facultative voting than in compulsory voting). I will not delve into this debate. I think, in line with advocates of optional voting, that the vote must be exercised responsibly, and that it is immoral to vote without minimally adequate information. Compulsory voting systems yield signals that encourage uncritical participation, which is what the defenders of epistemic democracy want to conjure.

I do not want to neglect the importance of this debate, but I understand that both alternatives (compulsory vs. optional) are not the only options available. It is worth considering a third possibility: optional voting with public participation, or *civic voting*, as I will call it here. This new system can be very promising in light of an experiment that examines the strength of social control in the decision to vote or abstain (Della Vigna et. al, 2014). The experiment shows that the act of voting has indeed an intrinsic value for most people: people are largely motivated to vote because they value the act of voting in itself and because people want to

maintain a positive public image. People may vote not only because they honor something of intrinsic value, but also to avoid the embarrassment of acknowledging in public that they did not vote, or to avoid the psychological cost of lying to others. My intuition is that this “public image” does not only encourage voter turnout, it also promotes investment in cognitive efforts for an informed vote, thereby strengthening the public-oriented or sociotropic insight of the vote. I propose, based on these considerations, the creation of an online public record of individual voter turnout, in order to both encourage voter participation and strengthen the incentives for pro-social behavior, while guaranteeing freedom of choice and the secrecy of the vote.

c) New types of votes

In contemporary democracies it is assumed that abstention (i.e. not voting for any of the available alternatives) has no epistemic value, not even of a second order. It is assumed the system gains nothing in knowing if those who abstain from voting did so because they did not have enough information, because they suspended judgment on the matter, because they rejected all alternatives, because that day they had other priorities than voting, because they rejected the democratic order, or because they liked all alternatives or candidates and remained indifferent about them. Abstention amounts, in this view, as a kind of missing data, from which we cannot infer any epistemic attitude. However, as obvious as that the reasons that lead to abstention may be heterogeneous, it is equally obvious that some of those reasons convey valuable information, although the reasons not expressed as a preference for candidate A, B or C. For example, if I think that both A and B are bad candidates, and no other alternative is available, I may consider it reasonable to abstain from voting for any of them. And it can happen, in fact, to be true that both A and B are bad candidates in light of any reasonable evaluation standard. The system treats my abstention on an equal footing with those who abstain from voting out of laziness, or conformism. It should be obvious that this represents a poor way of processing epistemic beliefs and judgments of the people. A democratic system should attempt to be sensitive to the reasons of abstentions, because some of those reasons are epistemically valuable to the rest of society.

An efficient democratic system in epistemic terms should allow the possibility not only to vote for the candidate (or party) A, B or C, but also the opportunity to vote for a “rejection of all candidates” and/or? to cast vote in abstention or suspension of judgment (I neither reject nor accept any candidate or alternative). If these options are available, then it will be possible to distinguish, in practice, between “turnout,” abstention, and the act of voting “for” or “against” a candidate. Compulsory voting systems that do not give the opportunity to cast a vote of total rejection or a vote of abstention (or suspension of judgment), and that allow only a vote “for” a candidate, are systems that restrict freedom of choice, because some reasonable options (the suspension of judgment, or the rejection of all candidates) are excluded from the menu of alternatives. For the same reason, voluntary voting systems that do not allow the possibility to cast a vote of total rejection or a vote of abstention also restrict the freedom of choice of people, because those who uphold those preferences can only choose not to turnout or cast a null vote to express their preferences, but the system records them indiscriminately along with the abstentions of those who are pleased with any candidate, with those who reject the whole democratic order, and with those who did not turnout because they honored other activities, among other reasons to abstain from turnout.

To sort out these problems, I believe that the voting system should combine the following features:

First, there should be an irrebuttable legal presumption through which the legal system presumes that those who do not turnout render their conformity to whatever the outcome of elections or referendum is. This assumption amounts, indeed, to changing the *statu quo* by default. In the current system, the default option uncovers only “uncertainty” regarding the reasons of those who of abstain from voting. We cannot presume anything specific from abstention, although we are always trying to gauge the intentions of abstainers. My proposal aims to give, by default, a legal irrebuttable meaning to the behavior of not going to the polls, by setting a conclusive presumption (*iure et de iure*). The idea of an absolute presumption or *iure et de iure* makes sense from the moment the system would allow voting by mail (for those who, for reasons of disability or temporary residence, are unable to attend the polling station), the “vote of total rejection” and the “abstention vote” (or “suspension of judgment” vote). With these options available, it may be justified to interpret -from the behavior of not going to the polls- an absolute presumption of conformity with the outcomes of the elections. Since those who hadn’t turnout could have voted by email or could have voted to suspend

judgment or to reject all the candidates, then we may legitimately assume that they accept or agree with the conclusion of the vote.

Our democratic arrangements should take advantage of the “second order” epistemic value of suspension of judgment. The current arrangement only allows the expression of preferences based on “stubborn” beliefs about A, B or C, and mistreats suspensions of judgment equating them with ignorance, full rejection of all candidates, full rejection of the political order, laziness, or indifferent conformity with all candidates. Clearly, such a system is not suitable for the intelligent aggregation of judgments or epistemic attitudes. Even when suspension of judgment is based on ignorance (for example, because the citizen feels incompetent to assess the available evidence and therefore prefers not to take sides on any alternative), his/her cognitive attitude deserves much more credit than if he or she blindly decides to support a particular option. Suspension of judgment is a responsible epistemic attitude, even when it is founded on ignorance, and that epistemic attitude has a clear moral force: it expresses the idea that the agent values autonomy and informative rigor in evaluating the evidence and therefore rejects blind deference to opinion leaders².

Once we decide to recognize the informative value carried by suspensions of judgment and preferences of full rejection, practical difficulties appear. It should be noted that an attitude to abstain from taking sides in an issue of whether someone is competent or incompetent to rule, should not count the same way in political representation, as a belief that contains informative force on the matter. An agnostic attitude or a preference to reject all candidates should not be treated in the same way as preferences that specifically support candidates, they don't give any solution to the urgent need society has to establish a political authority, capable of promoting collective action. If they give me a set of options to choose from, and I don't choose anyone (or reject all) in a context in which there is an urgent collective need to choose one, my abstention (or full rejection) may have some critical epistemic value, but the instrumental need to choose one option justifies giving more value or weight to the votes of those who select a single option, relative to those who abstain or

²This account of democratic arrangements deliberately opposes Gramsci's position that our most vital duty in life is to “take sides” on any matter and that agnosticism is to be hated (Gramsci, 1918).

reject all options. Moreover, if a significant percentage of people decide to cast a vote of abstention or full rejection, and these abstentions (or rejections) are translated proportionally into legislative seats, a vacuum of power would emerge. For example, if 51% decide to cast a vote of abstention, and these abstentions were translated into 51% of seats, it is obvious that it will be impossible for any governing coalition to reach an absolute majority of member votes, only bills that require the support of an absolute majority of members present could be approved, and only if quorums are set below that threshold. In the hypothetical extreme, if everybody decides to cast a vote of abstention, we would have a scenario of a total vacuum of power. Such a scenario could perhaps have some valuable meaning from the perspective of political equality, but it is obvious from an instrumental epistemic dimension that this turns out to be absurd: in complex societies like those we are used to live in, a situation of a total vacuum of power is never justified, not even in the unthinkable circumstances in which every citizen, with full autonomy, abdicates from the existence of the state. The task of providing public goods and maintaining social peace would still demand the establishment of political authority even in a society of state deniers.

However, these considerations don't prevent us to design systems in which the abstention votes and full rejection votes are translated somehow into a lower layer of political representation –relative to other kind of votes- in order to take advantage of the epistemic force that they carry. We may think on different formulas to achieve that goal, and one could be: $E\% = \sqrt{Vr\% + Vs\%}$, which means that the percentage of empty seats ($E\%$), representative of abstentions and full rejections, is equivalent to the square root of the sum of the percentages of both kind of votes (abstentions and rejections). If the number includes decimals, then it is rounded down, if the figure is less than 0.5, and rounded up if it is higher. The resultant amount of seats is split between the two kinds of votes through the D'Hondt system.

Empty chairs, I believe, can have an instrumental epistemic effect on the quality of public policies: politicians will always be aware, in their deliberations, of the percentage of society that remain agnostic or reject the full list of parties. Moreover, empty chairs can also have more direct practical effects, since it will be softer or harder, depending on the amount of empty seats, to achieve an absolute majority of member's votes. Empty seats corresponding to votes of abstentions should be taken as abstentions, and those corresponding to full rejection votes should be taken as votes of rejections in the legislative plenary.

Under this system it may happen, as a hypothetical case, that a very high percentage of the population with voting rights (over 50%) reject “all” candidates. In that case, it is clear that whoever ends up winning the election would lack any democratic legitimacy. A remedy to deal with these situations could involve establishing the need to convene new elections with new candidates within a reasonable period of time. However, a rejection higher than 50% of the population would express not only a general dissatisfaction with political parties, but it should also be interpreted as an indicator of the malfunctioning of democratic structural arrangements. So when the votes of full rejection exceed 50% of the population (counting in this percentage those who conform to whatever election outcome by not going to the polls), the system should automatically (within a reasonable period, e.g. one month) hold elections for a constituent assembly. The constituent assembly shall, within a reasonable time period (e.g. four months), reform the constitution. Meanwhile, the incumbent government will remain in power but will not be able to pass any legislation without a 2/3 majority of the members. I think this is how we can deal with these kinds of abnormal situations.

A new way of regulating abstentions and absences in the legislative procedure

What is the appropriate regime of abstentions in legislative assemblies? The point of departure is the acknowledgement that, since an assembly is composed of a large number of people, subjected to a division of labor in specific topics, the fact that some of them suspend judgment and refrain from taking sides on an issue doesn't necessarily indicate defending the *statu quo*. Abstention in an assembly should instead be considered equivalent to deferring judgment to other legislators, who do have a firm conviction for one of the sides.

In many informal assemblies, decisions are taken by the method of non-objection, or non-opposition (see Urfalino, 2006). Under this method, the President of the Assembly (or any other participant) makes a proposal, and if nobody objects it, then it is approved. By default abstentions are equated as *de facto approvals*, and only explicit objections, if any, are publicly aired. Insofar abstentions are counted as confirmation votes, it may be the case that a large majority of people suspend judgment on the issue and the proposal ends up being approved with the real support of a

few people. Why is this regime commonly accepted in many political bodies while it is rejected in formal official legislatures? If a supermajority cast a vote of abstention, the only obvious thing to infer from that fact is that the supermajority couldn't take sides on the issue. Inferring the rejection of the proposal is not epistemologically justified. It may be reasonable to assume, then, that in such situations, the only inference we can draw is that lawmakers need more time to evaluate the arguments and evidence of both sides at stake and to consider other possible alternatives, in order to increase the probability of selecting the best side. This argument, then, justifies considering abstentions -when the number of them exceed a certain threshold- as a delay device.

In the light of these considerations, I propose the following regime of abstentions in legislative assemblies. If abstentions exceed a certain minority threshold (e.g. 1/3) then the Legislature should call a panel of experts in a reasonable period of time. After hearing from the experts, legislators will proceed to vote again on the issue, but this time abstentions will be considered as "yes" or approval votes. If in the first voting stage, abstentions exceed an absolute majority threshold (i.e. more abstentions than the sum of "yes" and "no" votes) then the Legislature must call a citizen's assembly recruited by lot (and which will work in a similar way to the British Columbia Citizen's Assembly in 2004) in a reasonable period of time. This citizen's assembly must hear the different expert views on the issue, deliberate together, and finally vote on the issue (yes, no or abstention). Once a vote is cast, and a majority of citizens vote for "yes" or "no," then the Legislature should again consider the proposal and vote accordingly, taking into consideration the recommendation of the citizen's assembly. In this second stage, legislators could not cast a vote for abstention. In the hypothetical case of a majority of citizens in the assembly casting a vote of abstention then the legislators can cast again a vote of abstention in the second voting session, and if a majority of legislators do indeed abstain, then the issue is put to a plebiscite. I think this is the way we should regulate abstentions in a legislative assembly.

As for absences, I understand that a modern Legislature should have no quorum. Simply, it should act under the legal presumption that those who are absent reject the proposal being considered. This presumption should come as no surprise. If someone is a representative, at least she has the moral duty to listen or to hear the complaints addressed by citizens or their representatives. Hence, there is a moral duty to "be present" not in a necessarily physical way (occupying the seat in the assembly) but in a communicational sense. Such a regime would lead to virtual forms of

“being present” that I understand have not yet received adequate parliamentary regulation. If we understand that governments have the moral duty to “listen” to complaints and arguments, then to be absent -in the communicative sense of the term- is to be interpreted as the rejection of the proposals. To be sure, this regime will not prevent legislators from being absent for strategic reasons, but it will considerably reduce them.

In this regard, it would be good to contrast this proposal to the thinking of Jeremy Bentham (1791), who believed that absence of legislators is to be interpreted as an attitude of suspension of judgment. The thought of Bentham makes sense when you consider that British legislators cannot abstain from voting nor cast a vote of abstention, and only their absence can have the effect of an abstention. But if we believe that attending (and therefore being present) is a moral duty and that legislators should be able to be present and cast a vote of “abstention” from voting, then we can devise a system by which (unjustified) absences are automatically counted as “nays” for violating the duty to “listen” to complaints or arguments.

Innovations for citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy

As I argued above, I think that citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy, as used in Switzerland and Uruguay, should be re-thought when thinking about a new model of epistemic participatory democracy. First, like Switzerland, I think it is important to ban plebiscites or the call for a popular vote “from above,” unless the call for a popular vote is due to a majority of abstentions in the Legislature as explained above. Second, like Uruguay, I believe that the system should include both the popular initiative for constitutional amendments, the abrogative referendum (or referendum “against” laws) and also the popular “legal” initiative. It would be better if all these mechanisms had a constitutional status. Unlike Uruguay, however, I understand that the call (in any of the mechanisms) should never be held concurrently with a general election for representatives. There should be an explicit prohibition in that regard.

Some restrictions are in order, however. Third, the popular initiative for legal reform and the abrogative referendum, regarding taxes and budget bills, should include a very demanding threshold for the gathering of signatures (e.g. 25% or 30%). On other matters, both mechanisms should have more permissive thresholds, between 3% and 8% (3% for abrogative

referendums and 8% for legal initiatives). It is important at this point to underscore that the wording should be very precise, to avoid what happens in some countries (as in Mexico), where the law forbids any referendum on any matter affecting “income and expenses,” so virtually no meaningful reform can be put forward to a referendum.

Fourth, citizen initiatives for constitutional reform should also contain a demanding threshold (25% or 30%) of signatures, to be collected within a reasonable time frame (e.g. 160 days) or to be collected -as in Uruguay- in a kind of a “pre-referendum” day once a minimum percentage of signatures (2 or 5 %) has been certified.

Fifth, for all types of referendums, there should be a quorum of electoral participation: in the case of abrogative referendums and initiatives of legal reform, the quorum should be 30%, whereas in the case of referendums for constitutional reforms, quorums should be more demanding (45%).

Sixth, there should be a rule that sets a limit on the number of issues that can be voted and the type of links that bind these issues together, to avoid collective irrationalities. Thus, in the case of initiatives for partial constitutional amendments, the proposals may include many issues only if they respect “the unity of matter.” In the case of legal reform initiatives or referendum against laws, the rule of the “single issue” applies, which means that voters are asked just one single question in each referendum.

Seventh, to prevent the proliferation of initiatives (with the consequent accumulation of topics and issues), it may be sound to set a temporary restriction on only two proposals that have gathered signatures on a given election year. This means that the first two proposals that have reached the required threshold of signatures cancel the possibility of gathering signatures for the rest of pending proposals. Other proposals should wait for the following year in order to start gathering signatures again. In that way, a temporary restriction of one constitutional reform initiative per year, and two referenda and popular initiatives laws against constitutional reform per year would be sound.

Eighth, it is important to introduce institutions that promote informed voting and freedom of choice. In the case of Switzerland and Uruguay, it is interesting to see that when an initiative for constitutional reform is launched, the government can put forward a counterproposal. However, the same does not happen with initiatives for legal reform or abrogative referendums. Concerning abrogative referendums, neither Swiss nor Uruguayan citizens can raise a counterproposal. We believe this restriction favors manipulation of the agenda by the government. An interesting way

to sort out this limitation is to convene a citizen assembly (following again the British Columbia Model), within the period from the validation of signatures to the day of the popular vote, and with the task of drafting a citizen counterproposal by a majority vote (see Altman, 2014). Another way is allowing for the possibility of raising a counterproposal if this is supported by a more demanding threshold of signatures (e.g. 8% if the call for an abrogative referendum requires 3%).

Ninth, the arrangement of the electoral calendar in popular initiatives should not be in the hands of the government (as it is in Switzerland for initiatives for constitutional reform), in order to avoid the strategic manipulation of electoral cycles (Schwartz, Bächtiger and Lutz, 2011). The constitution should include time constraints to ensure that elections are held within a stipulated period since the signatures are gathered (e.g. 40 days for cases of referendum against laws and initiatives of legal reform, and one year for initiatives of constitutional reform).

A key innovation, the tenth item, is aimed at improving autonomous, informed and public-oriented preferences in popular referendums. At this point, it is appropriate to highlight the Oregon State experience here. The Oregon's "*Citizen's Initiative Review*" is an assembly of 24 citizens drawn by lot (since 2011) with the legal task of making recommendations –after due deliberation and hearing of expert's views- for citizens on how to vote (for or against). The idea of this mechanism is to try to overcome pathologies that are common in traditional mechanisms of direct democracy: poor information, high complexity of the matters at stake, group-interest bias, among others. The assembly or jury address the proposal that is to be put to popular vote in two or three days, hear the arguments and evidence that are put forward by defenders and complainants, and then reach an informed decision. This decision will be translated in the official voter information guide. It is intended that uninformed voters, before casting their vote in the ballot box or electronic machine, can read clearly the conclusions reached by the assembly of citizens, as well as the main reasons behind those conclusions. Studies show that this mechanism significantly improves the information of voters: those who had read the reports of the jury answered more correctly (in fact, two times more than those who hadn't read them_ (Report on citizens' initiative review in Oregon, 2013: 26-28, Gastil and Knobloch, 2010). I believe, however, that the Oregon system can be significantly

improved in epistemic terms. First, jurors should be able to vote in case of disagreement (in Oregon, they are required to reach a “consensus statement”). On the other hand, I believe that the final decision of the jury should be reflected in the back of the ballot (and not in an information voter guide), with the following information: number of jurors who approved the initiative or proposal and its central argument, and number of jurors who disagree with the initiative or proposal and its central argument. It would be sound to hold citizens juries in all types of referenda (although it may be advantageous to convene a larger assembly for the initiatives for constitutional reform).

Eleventh, the incumbent Legislature will be able to repeal an approved referendum only with a supermajority of member’s votes. If new elections are held, then the new Legislature is able to repeal by majority vote only referenda that have been passed in precedent legislative mandates. These are cautions that should be considered in order to avoid legal instability while keeping our democratic commitments safe.

Another important innovation, the twelfth item, involves the creation of a citizen Commission (formed by representatives of the promoters of each initiative) that will have special powers of access to public information, to call public hearings and have legal standing in judicial proceedings concerning the implementation of approved referendums. All those powers are aimed at preventing the executive branch from circumventing or betraying the spirit of the referendum by issuing fraudulent regulations or by not regulating the implementation of conditions of the decision.

Thirteenth, there should be a law that makes it mandatory that a televised public debate on the issue at stake be done the day before the popular vote, in which both sides of the issue are represented.

And finally, fourteenth, as explained when addressing the epistemic objections to direct democracy, the introduction of an hybrid regime of democratic decision-making, through which the votes of representatives are counted concurrently with citizen’s votes (of an infinitesimal value) should be considered. At least it doesn’t seem sound to neglect it, for there are strong epistemic reasons to that kind of regime.

Conclusions

I have argued that democracy draws part of its justification from the epistemic task of reaching good enough decisions. But democracy cannot rely solely on such a justification without collapsing into a government of experts or an epistocracy. The need to accommodate the epistemic

dimension of democracy with the principle of equal political participation puts limits on the democratic epistemic goal or task: the goal is to achieve in a structural way, with a probability better than chance, good enough decisions at the collective level. This standard must be accommodated with the institutions that regulate citizen participation in decision-making. Neither pure representative democracy nor current democratic arrangements of citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy are up to that task. My claim is that they both fall short of the epistemic modesty standard required for democratic legitimacy. The remedy proposed is a new model of –what I have called– epistemic participatory democracy, aimed at encouraging in a structural way the emergence of autonomous, informed and public-oriented preferences in citizen participation. This goal is achieved by introducing some democratic innovations: a new regime for citizen voting, a new form of regulating abstentions, a new legislative procedure regime, and a new system of citizen-initiated direct democracy.

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S i m p o s i o
EUGENIO LECALDANO,
SUL SENSO DELLA VITA

LA RICERCA DI UN SENSO NELLA VITA, LA PROSPETTIVA MORALE E I LIMITI DI UNA CONCEZIONE SENTIMENTALISTA

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ABSTRACT

I discuss Eugenio Lecaldano's view of the search for meaning in life focusing on three issues. First, I suggest that an accurate account should accommodate both a prospective and a retrospective mode of the reflection on meaning in one's own life. Second, Lecaldano's distinction between meaningfulness and morality is underdetermined in two respects: (a) because a more flexible view of morality is able to integrate a consideration of meaningfulness in terms of the agent's own perfection, avoiding moralistic implications, and (b) because a genuine separation between meaningfulness and morality seems to make sense only from a third-person standpoint. Third, I argue that Lecaldano's sentimentalist view is not supported by conclusive arguments and cannot account for the possibility of a meaningful life without feelings of accomplishment and affirmation.

KEYWORDS

Meaning of life, morality, perfection, sentimentalism

Nel suo *Sul senso della vita* Eugenio Lecaldano presenta un ambizioso ed elegante tentativo di mettere a fuoco una questione esistenziale di primaria importanza attraverso lo sguardo analitico del filosofo, ma insieme anche, nella direzione inversa, di portare nell'indagine filosofica la piena consapevolezza di una dimensione che caratterizza le vite umane. La riflessione di Lecaldano si inserisce in un rinnovato interesse per questo ordine di problemi all'interno della filosofia analitica, testimoniato da una discussione che si sta facendo sempre più intensa e

variegata.¹ In una conferenza tenuta nel 1976 David Wiggins aveva osservato che i filosofi avrebbero dovuto riprendere a considerare anche la questione del significato della vita “a meno di non voler continuare a concepire la filosofia morale come la casistica delle emergenze” (Wiggins 1987, 88). La discussione attuale, infine, rende ragione a tale istanza e ne dimostra la fecondità con la varietà delle prospettive che entrano in gioco, come mostra ora anche l’analisi di Lecaldano.

La lucidità della riflessione di Lecaldano si esprime nella nettezza di alcune tesi centrali, ma anche, anzitutto, nell’individuare e seguire dei *desiderata* di fondo largamente condivisibili che sono utili a inquadrare i termini della discussione. Come egli sottolinea a più riprese, il contributo della filosofia si iscrive in un quadro di riferimento d’ispirazione illuministica, che concentra l’analisi del problema su aspetti dell’esperienza naturale degli esseri umani, invece di richiamarsi a spiegazioni teologiche o religiose (Lecaldano 2016, 31 s.). In contrasto con interpretazioni trascendenti, che egli arriva a chiamare “favolistiche”, Lecaldano caratterizza l’analisi filosofica della domanda sul senso di una vita come un’indagine secolare e naturalistica.² Anche grazie alla chiarezza riguardo ai criteri orientativi del contributo della filosofia su questo tema, un aspetto centrale del valore delle riflessioni di Lecaldano in proposito sta nella capacità di sollecitare ulteriormente un dibattito in proposito, avanzando delle tesi impegnative all’interno di un quadro delimitato in modo limpido. Spero di dare un contributo alla discussione indicando alcuni punti della riflessione di Lecaldano che potrebbero beneficiare di chiarimento o di approfondimento. Mi soffermerò in particolar modo sullo statuto fenomenologico della domanda sul senso della vita individuale, sul suo rapporto con istanze morali, e su pregi e limiti di un’interpretazione di tale domanda in chiave sentimentalistica.

1. LO STATUS FENOMENOLOGICO DELLA DOMANDA SUL SENSO DELLA VITA

Per isolare la questione su cui concentra la propria attenzione, Susan Wolf parla di *meaning in life*, distinguendolo da *meaning of life* (cfr. Wolf 2010): l’oggetto di indagine è il senso di una vita individuale, e non dell’esistenza della specie umana o di forme di vita in generale. Lecaldano segue un percorso simile e chiarisce dalle prime battute che la questione su cui egli si concentra è caratterizzata anzitutto da una matrice biografica ed esistenziale. Egli fa riferimento a “occasioni nelle quali questa interrogazione si è effettivamente presentata alla mente [...] con urgenza e necessità” (Lecaldano 2016, 9). La ricerca del senso della vita è radicata nell’esperienza individuale, ha in essa il proprio posto e va dunque esaminata e

¹ Un primo bilancio è tracciato in Metz 2002; si veda poi Metz 2007. Da allora il dibattito si è molto intensificato.

² Per un confronto più articolato tra approcci naturalistici e approcci teologico-religiosi cfr. p.es. Metz 2005.

compresa anzitutto per la funzione che ha nella prospettiva individuale. Un momento essenziale dell'indagine, perciò, deve essere dedicato a chiarirne lo status fenomenologico o, forse meno pomposamente, il ruolo psicologico. Tuttavia non sono sicuro che l'analisi di Lecaldano sia pienamente convincente per questo rispetto, se non altro perché un elemento della questione che egli non mette in grande risalto appare a me, invece, importante per chiarire le caratteristiche fenomenologiche della ricerca di un senso nella propria vita.

Lecaldano osserva che, in particolar modo nell'età giovanile, molte vicende e scelte sono "accompagnate, seppure in modo del tutto implicito, da una ricerca di senso" (Lecaldano 2016, 10). Un esempio è dato dall'"interrogarsi sul [...] progetto procreativo di una nuova vita", che rientra "nell'orizzonte della ricerca di un senso per la propria vita" (Lecaldano 2016, 11). Altrimenti sembra che tale domanda si affacci, in maniera non meno pressante, in circostanze segnate da difficoltà personali, dove si arriva a mettere in questione anche se proseguire nella propria esistenza (cfr. Lecaldano 2016, 11). Lecaldano propone di descrivere, in generale, il ruolo della domanda fondamentale sul senso della nostra vita individuale come "una sorta di interlocuzione continua con noi stessi, che ci accompagna mentre agiamo e facciamo progetti, più tacita quando tutto procede in modo abitudinario, a voce più alta quando si presentano intoppi e imprevisti" (Lecaldano 2016, 12). La domanda diviene infine "sempre più pressante" nell'avvicinarsi a un'età avanzata (Lecaldano 2016, 12).

Secondo questo modello descrittivo la questione del senso della propria vita è sempre presente, più o meno chiaramente, nel percorso lungo il quale si costruisce l'esistenza individuale, di cui sembrerebbe rappresentare una sorta di basso continuo, percepibile in maniera anche molto diversa a seconda dei casi individuali e delle circostanze. Ponendo il problema in questi termini si rischia di perdere, temo, una differenza, che non mi sembra irrilevante, tra due funzioni o modalità dell'interrogazione sul senso della propria vita. Il proposito centrale di Lecaldano è di "identificare il 'nocciolo duro' della pratica della ricerca sul senso della vita" (Lecaldano 2016, 129), ma tale pratica può avere una funzione prospettiva, rivolta verso il futuro, e una funzione retrospettiva, rivolta verso il passato. Credo che ci siano argomenti per considerarla in ciascuna delle due angolazioni. Non voglio sostenere che si tratti di due opzioni o di due funzioni alternative tra loro, ossia che la questione debba essere posta esclusivamente o dall'uno o dall'altro punto di vista; si può sostenere, anzi, che vi sia qualche continuità tra essi. Tuttavia la differenza mi sembra rilevante, sia a livello analitico, sia a livello esistenziale. A seconda che la ricerca di un senso nella propria vita proceda in maniera prospettiva o retrospettiva non cambia semplicemente la direzione temporale, come se fosse indifferente muoversi dal presente verso il futuro o volgersi verso il passato alla luce delle scelte che si sono compiute; cambia, invece, il significato, o il valore strutturale, della

domanda, anzitutto dal punto di vista dell'individuo che si interroga, e che qui – come sottolinea Lecaldano – va privilegiato.

Da un lato si può pensare che domandarsi quale sia, o quale si vuole che sia, il senso della propria esistenza contribuisca alle nostre scelte. In tal caso si suggerisce che la ricerca di una vita sensata contribuisce, direttamente o indirettamente, alle ragioni in base alle quali agire, magari fornendo ragioni di uno specifico tipo. Dall'altro lato, se si considera la domanda in termini retrospettivi, ci si concentra su una riflessione che può avvenire, paradigmaticamente, sul letto di morte (Wolf 2010, 8), ossia che non può che volgersi all'indietro per riesaminare scelte e comportamenti passati, e il modo in cui essi hanno determinato il percorso della nostra esistenza, almeno fino a un certo momento. Naturalmente, non è necessario pensare a un bilancio finale della propria vita: è sufficiente che la riflessione riguardi scelte passate, non più modificabili, che hanno connotato un momento del percorso esistenziale di un individuo. Senza toccare ancora il problema della relazione con le istanze morali (su cui torno nel § 2), una riflessione del genere è perlomeno analoga alla valutazione operata dalla coscienza, per il suo carattere retrospettivo. Se da un lato l'interrogarsi sul senso della propria vita avrebbe un ruolo motivazionale e rappresenterebbe un elemento della costruzione del proprio profilo di essere umano, dall'altro lato si tratterebbe invece della valutazione *ex post* di tale profilo, che può dare esiti anche molto diversi dalla riflessione che guarda al futuro. Lo si vede, per esempio, nei casi in cui l'esame retrospettivo dia un risultato determinato anche dal mutamento di ideali e di valori individuali, come quello della ragazza che veda *ex post* che la decisione, all'epoca tormentata, di diventare madre ha conferito senso alla propria vita.³

In entrambe le modalità si incontrano delle tensioni, che sono però significativamente diverse nei due casi. Se si intende la ricerca di un senso nella propria vita come contributo alle scelte di fronte alle quali ci si trova, si corre il rischio di delineare un modello di decisione assai complesso, se non artificioso. La concretezza della ricerca di un senso risulterebbe psicologicamente meno plausibile, mentre la tensione che essa esprime sembrerebbe assumere una connotazione normativa più spiccata, visto che si supporrebbe che le scelte dovrebbero essere guidate direttamente anche da considerazioni di tale ordine, o addirittura che la ricerca di senso sia la prima fonte di motivazione.⁴ In base a questa interpretazione, uno studente brillante potrebbe decidere che la sua vita avrebbe pienamente senso se dedicasse le proprie energie alla ricerca scientifica, per esempio trascurando, o rendendo più difficili, relazioni personali e impegno sociale. Se, invece, la domanda sul senso della propria esistenza è intesa come un'interrogazione che si volge alle scelte fatte in precedenza, si incontra la difficoltà di separare la valutazione delle proprie decisioni dai risultati a cui hanno portato. In questo caso, dunque, la ricerca

³ Per interpretazioni diverse delle implicazioni di questo caso cfr. p.es. Wallace 2013, 5 ss. e Bagnoli (inedito).

⁴ Cfr. p.es. Frankl 1959, 99, cit. in Smuts 2013, 538.

di un senso nel profilo individuale che abbiamo costruito nel passato sembra dipendente dagli esiti delle nostre azioni. Per usare i termini a cui Lecaldano dà più risalto, il senso di un'esistenza dipenderebbe allora non semplicemente dai progetti personali, ma anche, e in maniera decisiva, dal loro grado di successo. Questa interpretazione è un'opzione teorica possibile, e può condurre, nella sua forma più netta, a una *achievementist view* secondo cui "la tua vita ha un significato soltanto se, e nella misura in cui, consegui gli obiettivi a cui la dedichi in maniera libera e competente." In tale prospettiva "questi risultati sono *il* significato della tua vita".⁵ Alcune implicazioni di una concezione del genere sono chiare: per esempio, retrospettivamente, lo scienziato che sacrifica ogni altro aspetto della propria vita a ricerche che però non conducono a risultati utili (magari per la mancanza dei fondi di cui dispone) non sarebbe in grado di riconoscere un senso positivo nella sua esistenza.⁶ Ciò è in contrasto, però, con il fatto che, secondo Lecaldano, "non possiamo certo accettare di ritenere sensate solo le vite riuscite e soddisfatte" (Lecaldano 2016, 84).

La differenza tra due direzioni della riflessione appare dunque piuttosto profonda, e soprattutto rilevante dal punto di vista esistenziale. Lecaldano non traccia una distinzione netta tra queste due modalità, ma sembra privilegiare, nei fatti, la prima prospettiva. Così, per esempio, egli osserva che in momenti di stallo esistenziale e motivazionale sembra che la ricerca di un senso possa giocare un ruolo (cfr. Lecaldano 2016, 31, 114). Ma viene il dubbio che si avrebbe così almeno solo un pensiero di troppo, se non due, per riprendere i termini di Williams.⁷ Si cercherebbe, cioè, non solo di concentrarsi su un orientamento generale, invece che su elementi specifici della situazione in cui si trova a scegliere, ma anche di chiedersi in che modo, arrivati alla fine della nostra esistenza, potremmo riconoscere un senso in essa in conseguenza della scelta in questione, probabilmente considerandola non solo in maniera isolata, ma in relazione con decisioni precedenti.⁸ Una riflessione di questo genere non suona meno astratta, per esempio, di un test dell'universalizzazione.

Al di là delle tensioni che l'analisi incontra nei due casi, un profilo fenomenologicamente accurato della questione, come quello che Lecaldano ambisce a tracciare, dovrebbe chiarire ulteriormente, credo, come intende l'intreccio delle due dimensioni in cui essa si svolge. I criteri che entrano in gioco possono anche

⁵ Luper 2014, 198. Ma si vedano anche le proposte di Smuts 2013 e Bramble 2015.

⁶ Sui limiti della necessità di successo per il riconoscimento della sensatezza delle proprie scelte si vedano però le considerazioni di Wallace 2013, 140 ss.

⁷ Sulla difficoltà di pensare a specifiche ragioni relative al possibile significato di una vita cfr. anche Wolf 2010, 116 ss., in risposta alle obiezioni di Arpaly.

⁸ Sull'irrilevanza pratica della ricerca di senso nella propria vita, intesa separatamente da altre istanze, cfr. anche Crisp 2008, 178 s.

essere gli stessi in entrambi i casi, almeno in parte (su questo tornerò di seguito), ma il ruolo psicologico e fenomenologico della domanda semplicemente non sembra essere il medesimo.

2. SENSO DI UNA VITA E CRITERI MORALI: UNA SEPARAZIONE IMPOSSIBILE?

Una delle tesi centrali di Lecaldano è quella della necessità di tenere separata la ricerca di un senso della vita individuale e dalla valutazione morale. Lecaldano sostiene che interrogarsi sul senso della propria vita sia “una faccenda del tutto distinta dal cercare di dare un giudizio sull’accettabilità morale di quello che abbiamo fatto” (Lecaldano 2016, 48 s.). Il valore di cui si tratta in quell’interrogarsi “*non ha niente a che vedere con l’accettabilità morale*” e i rispettivi piani di riflessione sono tra loro diversi (Lecaldano 2016, 53; corsivo mio). La tesi non ha soltanto un’esplicita carica polemica, ma rappresenta anche un tassello fondamentale nell’articolarsi della posizione presentata da Lecaldano. Il ruolo strategico nell’argomentazione e il carattere polemico rendono quasi impossibile discutere seriamente la proposta di Lecaldano senza dedicare la propria attenzione, almeno in parte, alla tesi di fondo della separazione.⁹ Qui vorrei considerarne due aspetti problematici: l’orientamento antimoralistico e la plausibilità di tale separazione nella prospettiva individuale.

2.1. La tesi della separazione avanzata da Lecaldano è sostenuta, anzitutto, dalla convinzione della necessità di rendere ragione di un irriducibile pluralismo assiologico. Per questo rispetto Lecaldano converge con coloro che negli ultimi decenni hanno insistito sulla necessità di un’interpretazione plurale e differenziata dell’universo normativo in cui rientra anche la questione del senso di una vita personale (tra gli altri, Thomas Nagel, Joseph Raz, Susan Wolf, al netto delle differenze tra le rispettive posizioni). La tesi di Lecaldano ha un carattere profondamente polemico perché si contrappone a quella che egli considera la tradizionale tendenza a ridurre la questione della sensatezza di una vita a parametri morali (cfr. Lecaldano 2016, 49), che sembrerebbe avere come conseguenza immediata che valori non morali vengano trascurati, considerati irrilevanti o soppiantati. La prima ragione della separazione è, dunque, di consentire una valutazione non moralistica della sensatezza di una vita umana.

⁹ La concezione del rapporto tra senso della vita e moralità proposta da Lecaldano viene discussa qui anche da Gianfranco Pellegrino.

Questo obiettivo di fondo è condivisibile, e risponde anzi all'esigenza di resistere a una distorsione dei criteri morali.¹⁰ Il modo in cui viene adottato e sviluppato da Lecaldano, però, è probabilmente parziale. L'esigenza di concepire la morale in termini universali (ammesso che venga accettata, come fa Lecaldano) non implica omologazione e uniformità forzata nei contenuti dei comportamenti che ne seguono le richieste. La tesi della separazione proposta da Lecaldano si giustifica soltanto se non è possibile in alcun modo considerare i "valori specificamente dipendenti dalla prospettiva dell'agente individuale" – come li chiama Lecaldano, riprendendo Nagel (Lecaldano 2016, 52) – un elemento interno alla dimensione morale in senso proprio. Anzi, la tesi della separazione non sembra aver altro contenuto che la salvaguardia di quei valori e della loro pluralità dall'assimilazione alla morale e all'imparzialità delle sue richieste. Perciò la tesi della separazione verrebbe superata se fosse possibile considerare valori di quel genere in termini specificamente morali.

Per sostenere la necessità della separazione Lecaldano si richiama a Nagel – senza accoglierne il razionalismo –, ma in merito a un'argomentazione i cui obiettivi non mi sembrano del tutto convergenti con quelli di Lecaldano. Dal momento che "la razionalità etica pretende da noi imparzialità e la sottoscrizione di un 'punto di vista dell'universo'", "la ricerca di un senso per la propria vita non si esaurisce nella sottoscrizione di qualche benevolenza universale", perché in quella ricerca "hanno molta influenza fattori 'che dipendono dalla prospettiva personale'".¹¹ L'osservazione di Nagel è rivolta contro una concezione utilitaristica, anzitutto contro quella di Peter Singer, che consideri la promozione efficace del benessere altrui come il fine prioritario e l'autentica fonte di significato per una vita umana. Argomentando che il vantaggio del prossimo non è l'unico valore, perché vi sono anche le capacità e i progetti personali come indipendenti 'fonti di valore', tuttavia, non si esclude ogni possibilità di un nesso intrinseco tra senso della vita e istanze morali. La tesi della separazione tra ricerca di un senso nella vita e morale richiede ulteriori presupposti.

Le considerazioni di Nagel riprese da Lecaldano contengono indicazioni importanti di cui è necessario tenere conto, ma che è possibile sviluppare in una direzione diversa da quella di una separazione di piani di riflessione. I

¹⁰ Sul complesso di vizi compresi nell'etichetta generale di 'moralismo' si veda per esempio Taylor 2012. Sui limiti delle critiche al moralismo cfr. Archer i.c.s.

¹¹ Lecaldano 2016, 52. Qui Lecaldano riprende Nagel 2015.

“valori specificamente dipendenti dalla prospettiva dell’agente individuale” che dovrebbero costituire il contenuto caratteristico della ricerca di un senso nella vita potrebbero essere considerati un elemento interno alla prospettiva morale. Ci si può chiedere, perlomeno, se in questo modo non si presenti, più che un’autentica differenza nella dimensione normativa, un aspetto di pluralismo *interno* all’ambito morale. L’importanza cruciale di valori dipendenti dalla prospettiva individuale non esige *ipso facto* di separare la ricerca di un senso nell’esistenza individuale dalla morale. Al contrario, può rappresentare un buon argomento per riconoscere una dimensione intrasoggettiva della moralità, in cui ciò che ha rilevanza morale è anzitutto (anche se forse non esclusivamente) il rapporto del soggetto a se stesso, alle proprie capacità e al modo in cui esse vengono realizzate, anche nelle relazioni interpersonali. Escludendo dall’inizio questa opzione, si ha l’impressione che la strategia che sostiene la tesi della separazione equivalga, per parafrasare un luogo di Kant, a circoscrivere la morale per far posto alla domanda sul senso nella vita.

In alternativa a una ripartizione di competenze tra due questioni esistenziali – quella dell’orientamento nelle scelte morali e quella di una vita dotata di senso – si potrebbe pensare, dunque, a mettere a fuoco un’area della morale incentrata sul perfezionamento di sé, a condizione che ciò non sia limitato sin dall’inizio da un modello astratto di persona. Il punto di partenza verrebbe dato dalle particolari caratteristiche – capacità e disposizioni – di un soggetto individuale, individuate all’interno di un quadro generale definito dai criteri morali, che determinano un orientamento di massima delle richieste della moralità, senza imprimere sulle scelte un paradigma ferreo. Questa opzione non appare troppo distante dal contenuto della proposta di Lecaldano, che intende la ricerca di un senso nella propria orientata verso “un progetto di perfezionamento da perseguire in autonomia” (Lecaldano 2016, 120). Tale progetto interessa “le attività che coinvolgono il nostro carattere nella sua continuità e stabilità nel corso della nostra esistenza”, lasciando in secondo piano il comportamento verso altre persone (Lecaldano 2016, 132). Una concezione della morale può essere sufficientemente ampia e duttile da includere questa dimensione della vita individuale, accordandole anzi un ruolo centrale.

Il senso di una vita, infatti, potrebbe essere visto nel perseguimento della propria perfezione personale, che non solo non appiattisce le caratteristiche individuali, ma ne è naturalmente dipendente. Una prospettiva del genere non equivale a una soluzione come quella che Lecaldano critica in Charles Taylor in quanto legata a una “fuoriuscita da se stessi” per una “dispersione di se stessi in una realtà più importante” (Lecaldano 2016, 83), e non

scivolerebbe né nel modello platonico, né in quello stoico descritti da Lecaldano, seguendo Hume (Lecaldano 2016, 106 ss.). Gli obiettivi in base ai quali si determinano le scelte di una persona, così, non vengono riconosciuti come dotati di un'importanza intrinseca (cfr. Lecaldano 2016, 119), ma vengono determinati come importanti in quanto connotano il perfezionamento di quella persona. Il generale obiettivo morale del perseguimento autonomo della propria perfezione non determina una specifica serie di comportamenti, ma si determina in funzione di capacità e disposizioni individuali, oltre che delle circostanze, senza per questo smettere di essere un fondamentale principio di orientamento morale.¹² Così si potrebbe rendere ragione dell'idea, che Lecaldano riprende da Mill, che "una vita ha senso se in essa si realizza la libertà di perfezionare e di far progredire il proprio progetto di vita" (Lecaldano 2016, 115) *dall'interno* dell'ambito morale, senza rinunciare alle esigenze che guidano una concezione come quella di Lecaldano. Si noti che questo modo di porre la questione convergerebbe con la sua posizione anche per il fatto che non rimanda neppure alla necessità di scegliere attività in sé dotate di qualche valore oggettivo, come propone invece, per esempio, Susan Wolf.¹³ Intesa in questi termini, la ricerca di un senso nella propria vita non costituirebbe un limite dell'orizzonte della morale, e nemmeno una sua estensione o integrazione, ma uno dei suoi componenti centrali. Anche per questo rispetto, dunque, la tesi della separazione presentata da Lecaldano sembra richiedere ragioni ulteriori.

Intendere il senso della propria vita come un elemento della dimensione morale, invece che come una sorta di integrazione esterna, consentirebbe, inoltre, di vedere più chiaramente quale rapporto dovrebbero intrattenere le due istanze (o presunte tali). Lecaldano osserva che la dimensione morale "ha un indubbio valore regolativo" nella ricerca di senso, dal momento che "la salvaguardia dei valori morali è una *condizione necessaria* [...] per condurre una vita che sia dotata di senso", ma che essa tuttavia non è una condizione sufficiente (Lecaldano 2016, 49; corsivo mio). Ciò può significare che le indicazioni morali delimitano uno spazio per le scelte che si apre e si sviluppa, però, a un livello diverso e separato da quello della morale, e la cui sostanza sfugge dunque a un giudizio morale. Ferma restando la separazione

¹² Per un esempio di una concezione del genere si veda Herman 2008, 263 ss.

¹³ Cfr. Wolf 2010 e Lecaldano 2016, 55 e 130.

— che però allora non sarebbe piena indipendenza tra i due piani —,¹⁴ bisognerebbe definire una sorta di clausola di priorità delle richieste morali sulle altre istanze che orientano le nostre scelte. Se l'esigenza che conduce a delineare questo rapporto di articolazione di piani, che implica anche una dipendenza di uno di essi, è quella di salvaguardare la ricchezza individuale della sostanza dei profili personali che si delineano nelle nostre biografie, per garantirla non è necessario sostenere che i modi in cui una vita può acquistare senso “non ha[nno] niente a che vedere” con la moralità. Una concezione che veda nella propria perfezione un fine specificamente morale può benissimo lasciare aperto lo spazio in cui se ne definiscono i contenuti, ma rende più evidente come la valutazione del senso di una vita sia informato da un giudizio morale. Su questo aspetto della tesi della separazione credo che la posizione di Lecaldano necessiti di chiarimento.

2.2. Una separazione netta tra i due piani di riflessione potrebbe essere sostenuta in maniera plausibile a condizione di introdurre una differenza che modifica il significato della tesi, in modo tale che una piena indipendenza tra la ricerca di senso in una vita e la valutazione morale potrebbe valere, eventualmente, soltanto all'interno di un determinato punto di vista, pur rimanendo in tensione con un altro punto di vista. Per comprendere appieno la riflessione sul senso di una vita individuale, infatti, è probabilmente necessario distinguere anche tra la prospettiva interna che caratterizza la riflessione personale e la prospettiva esterna propria di un esame condotto dal punto di vista di terza persona. La differenza, ovviamente, non corrisponde a quella a cui accennavo nel paragrafo precedente: una funzione prospettiva e una retrospettiva sono modalità della riflessione interna al soggetto sulla sensatezza della propria esistenza. Un esame esterno è invece quello che prende in considerazione una vita individuale — nella sua interezza o per una parte rilevante — per riconoscervi un senso, o meno, senza essere direttamente coinvolti.

Lecaldano non esclude una distinzione simile. Nella sua analisi compaiono esempi di entrambi i generi. Per un verso si considerano casi in cui una persona riflette, nell'atto di scegliere oppure *ex post*, sulla sensatezza del proprio percorso individuale; per altro verso si esaminano casi paradigmatici di profili personali a cui attribuiamo un significato positivo. Tuttavia, considerare in maniera differente l'esame del senso nella propria vita e la

¹⁴ Si veda, infatti, Lecaldano 2016, 58, dove si nega che si intenda una vera e propria indipendenza, il che però sembra in tensione con la tesi che la ricerca di senso “non ha niente a che vedere” con la morale (Lecaldano 2016, 53).

riflessione su una biografia della quale non si risponde in prima persona non è inutile a comprendere in maniera più esatta l'interrogarsi su cui si concentra Lecaldano. Egli stesso osserva che "la vita di una persona può essere del tutto sensata e significativa per lei anche se noi al suo posto ne avremmo condotta un'altra del tutto diversa: in fondo, non ci potremo mai trovare *esattamente* nelle stesse condizioni di vita di un'altra persona" (Lecaldano 2016, 104). Quando si pensa ai casi di Gandhi o di Gauguin come possibili esempi di vite dotate di senso, la riflessione non procede del tutto allo stesso modo di quando ci si interroga sulla propria esistenza. Non vi è uno schema generale che governa le attribuzioni di significato in una vita e che viene indifferentemente applicato al caso proprio o altrui.

La differenza principale risiede nel fatto che da una prospettiva esterna sono assenti elementi che invece connotano in modo assai profondo la riflessione personale: rimorso, rimpianto o la rivendicazione delle proprie scelte passate. È possibile, certo, ragionare sulla parabola biografica altrui *come se* fosse la propria, magari anche provando l'analogo di certe reazioni sentimentali, per esempio dispiacendosi di scelte che ci appaiono infelici, infauste o inappropriate; ma lo facciamo appunto attraverso una procedura analogica, che ci richiede un cambiamento di prospettiva. Non è possibile, però, considerare la vita altrui ignorando l'impossibilità di determinare le scelte altrui esattamente come le proprie, che comporta l'impossibilità di provare, per esempio, autentico rimorso per i comportamenti di qualcun altro, o quello che Williams ha chiamato rinascimento dell'agente.

Questa differenza cruciale comporta un diverso rapporto con la moralità. L'argomento per sostenere una separazione di principio dovrebbe anzitutto mostrare che la prospettiva comune del soggetto individuale non viene rispecchiata, nei suoi tratti essenziali, dall'idea di accomunare istanze morali e ricerca di un senso. Da questo punto di vista, però, non sono sicuro che la proposta di Lecaldano risulti convincente. La prospettiva interna, ossia della riflessione in prima persona, sembra caratterizzata, infatti, da una maggiore difficoltà di una piena separazione da istanze morali. Quanto più direttamente è coinvolta una scelta, tanto più è difficile che la ricerca di un senso venga mantenuta del tutto distinta da criteri di ordine morale. Nella prospettiva interna, e in particolar modo nella dimensione rivolta a decisioni future, l'intreccio è tale che tracciare una distinzione netta sembra artificioso. Ponendo che valga, almeno come ipotesi, la distinzione tra funzione prospettiva e funzione retrospettiva della ricerca di un senso nella propria

vita, in entrambi i casi separare quella ricerca da istanze morali comporta complicazioni. Di fronte a scelte che ci conducono verso azioni possibili sembra artificioso che nella nostra riflessione l'esame, più o meno approfondito, o forse nemmeno esplicito, di ciò che ci viene moralmente richiesto sia ben distinto da un pensiero rivolto a ciò che dovrebbe poter rendere sensata la condotta di vita determinata con quella scelta. Lecaldano assume che i due criteri non dovrebbero divergere, ossia che la moralità di una scelta rappresenti una condizione necessaria perché essa contribuisca a una vita che il soggetto riconosce come sensata. Ma allora la specificità di ragioni ispirate dalla ricerca di senso sembra psicologicamente irrealistica. Il modello morale a cui accennavo prima avrebbe il vantaggio di poter considerare il momento della ricerca di un senso come una specificazione, rilevante per tutte le scelte *self-regarding*, di un orientamento morale generale. Nell'esame retrospettivo in cui il soggetto riflette sulla sensatezza del proprio percorso individuale, analogamente, la rivendicazione di scelte in cui egli è disposto a riconoscersi non è riducibile alla mera approvazione morale di esse, ma difficilmente ne può essere disgiunta. Casi in cui un agente voglia rivendicare certe azioni o progetti, pur vedendovi un difetto morale, sono perlomeno caratterizzati da un conflitto interno al soggetto che non sembra compatibile con un esito positivo della ricerca di un senso nella propria vita.

Al contrario, una separazione dei piani è assai più facile nella prospettiva esterna, in cui forse è più plausibile che nel percorso esistenziale di un individuo vengano apprezzati anche elementi non passibili di approvazione morale. Ma in tal caso, se la ricerca di un senso si diversifica decisamente da quello della morale, cambia di significato, e riguarda piuttosto la valutazione di un certo carattere di esemplarità. Mentre nel caso di un esame in prima persona appare molto più difficile sciogliere i legami con la morale, nella valutazione dall'esterno si tratta piuttosto di individuare un paradigma, in una riflessione che risponde a criteri di orientamento quasi narrativi, e che cerca anzitutto una coerenza di senso, a rischio di introdurla surrettiziamente. In questo caso è possibile, e frequente, una piena separazione dalla morale nella valutazione di un'esistenza. Allora il Gauguin di Williams può valere esemplarmente come un'ispirazione per un giovane artista, e non solo come cattivo esempio per un padre di famiglia. Per citare un autore apprezzato da Lecaldano, a Adolf Hitler si potrebbe allora attribuire il premio come

migliore dittatore nazista (Allen 1977).¹⁵ Un giudizio dall'esterno, dunque, può avvenire in base a criteri diversi da quelli morali. Secondo un'idea simile, Kant osservava che, se si bada solo alla costruzione di un carattere individuale, si ammira anche una persona cattiva, come Silla (qui una sorta di analogo classico di Hitler), perché non conta il valore delle sue azioni, ma la forza e la solidità delle sue risoluzioni (cfr. Kant 1798, 293). L'attribuzione di sensatezza a un'esistenza individuale dalla prospettiva di terza persona funziona in maniera analoga, orientandosi in base alla sua pienezza, coerenza o esemplarità rispetto a un certo ideale o a un determinato ordine di valori, per esempio estetico. Probabilmente, però, la valutazione dall'esterno ha anche una connotazione normativa diversa: l'attribuzione di sensatezza a una vita altrui non sembra indispensabile se non nella misura in cui essa ci appaia esemplare dell'adesione a un certo valore, o ordine di valori, che noi approviamo. Giudicare sensata una vita implica che la si riconosca dedicata a una causa che condividiamo. Non credo che a qualcuno che sia indifferente alla pittura o alla musica, o perfino le detesti, sarebbe possibile vedere un senso nella vita del Gauguin di Williams, o di Mussorgsky.¹⁶ D'altra parte, non ogni estimatore dell'*Anello del Nibelungo* e del *Parsifal* è obbligato a considerare la vita di Wagner un modello di esistenza sensata; può farlo, però, mettendo da parte una nozione di significato in chiave di moralità per adoperarne un'altra, intendendo la sensatezza di un'esistenza in relazione al valore estetico dei suoi prodotti.

Seguendo questa distinzione sembrerebbe dunque che la valutazione della sensatezza di un'esistenza “non ha niente a che vedere con l'accettabilità morale” (Lecaldano 2016, 53) soltanto quando viene condotta da una prospettiva esterna. In questo modo, però, si deroga a uno dei propositi di fondo dell'analisi di Lecaldano: rendere ragione delle caratteristiche peculiari della riflessione sul senso nella propria vita come meditazione che si svolge essenzialmente in prima persona. Se la riflessione che qui interessa è quella che ha il più diretto significato esistenziale, ossia quella che la persona svolge su se stessa, in forma riflessiva, la tesi della separazione non vale, e falsa i modi di quella riflessione. Se, invece, vale la tesi della separazione, l'analisi è

¹⁵ Una posizione del genere viene sostenuta, in termini più sobri, ma nell'ambito di una concezione soggettivistica della questione del senso di una vita che include una accurata separazione di essa da ogni giudizio morale: cfr. Kekes 2000, 30.

¹⁶ Ciò varrebbe *a fortiori* per una persona che, nata cieca o sorda, non abbia mai avuto nemmeno l'opportunità di apprezzare la pittura o la musica.

allora rivolta a un diverso modo di esaminare il senso di una vicenda individuale da quello che esercitiamo in prima persona.

Considerando l'intento antimoralistico alla base della posizione di Lecaldano e l'obiettivo di fornire un'analisi aderente alla fenomenologia della riflessione individuale, la tesi di una netta separazione di piani richiede ulteriori e più forti argomenti a suo sostegno. Altrimenti, bisogna prendere in considerazione la possibilità di integrare le medesime, condivisibili istanze teoriche in una concezione più duttile di moralità, che potrebbe essere in grado di rendere ragione dei modi in cui la ricerca di un senso nella vita entra in gioco nella prospettiva individuale. Sia la possibilità di intendere il senso di una vita in termini non moralistici, sia le caratteristiche della ricerca di tale senso dal punto di vista della prima persona mettono in dubbio l'opportunità di una piena separazione tra i due piani di riflessione, che li tratti davvero come indipendenti. Insistere esclusivamente in tale direzione rischia forse perfino di condurre a una posizione astratta e, da ultimo intellettualistica, più che a una proposta in grado di rendere conto del ruolo della ricerca di un senso nelle nostre vite. Se l'analisi ambisce a seguire il più fedelmente possibile tale modo di interrogarsi da parte di una persona, sembrerebbe allora più importante non la specificità di tale ricerca rispetto a criteri morali, ma l'intreccio che ne risulta, e che mi pare difficile da sciogliere. La questione sarebbe allora, piuttosto, in che modo la ricerca di senso incide sulla nostra comprensione dei criteri morali, e come i criteri morali orientano la nostra ricerca di senso.

3. SENTIMENTALISMO COME UNICA VIA?

Infine vorrei accennare a un altro tratto che caratterizza l'analisi di Lecaldano in maniera molto marcata. Egli propone di interpretare la riflessione sul senso della vita individuale e, aggiungerei, la base del carattere normativo di tale domanda, in termini sentimentalistici o emotivistici. Secondo Lecaldano “la ricerca del senso della vita è centrata su sentimenti ed emozioni e riguarda i desideri, gli interessi, la cura di ciò che è importante per una specifica persona” (Lecaldano 2016, 117). Dal momento che “il coinvolgimento in ciò che per noi è importante” è ciò che dà un senso alla nostra vita, “quindi, la struttura continuativa della nostra soggettività cui ci riferiamo cercando il significato della nostra vita *deve* essere ricostruita facendo prevalere la dimensione emotiva del nostro coinvolgimento nelle esperienze che abbiamo vissuto e in quelle che dobbiamo ancora vivere” (Lecaldano 2016, 73 ss.). Al di là della plausibilità di una concezione narrativa della soggettività secondo cui “ciò che rende *nostra* la nostra biografia [...] è il

dato emotivo” (Lecaldano 2016, 74), questa posizione, però, per come viene presentata, mi sembra esposta ad almeno due problemi, che dipendono dalla scarsa considerazione per alternative teoriche e da specifici limiti dell’emotivismo in questo contesto.

Una prima difficoltà ha, per così dire, carattere preliminare. Nell’appello a una concezione emotivistica da parte di Lecaldano mi appare problematico che essa sembra venire intesa come l’unica via possibile nel quadro della riflessione contemporanea, e che una parte consistente dell’argomentazione che la sostiene si risolva in una dichiarazione della mancanza di alternative plausibili. Come accennavo all’inizio, uno dei pregi della riflessione sul senso della vita articolata da Lecaldano è che chiarisce efficacemente dei *desiderata* condivisibili per un’analisi filosofica su questo tema, sottolineandone la fondamentale ispirazione illuministica. In più punti del libro, però, Lecaldano suggerisce che solo una posizione sentimentalista è in grado di soddisfare quei criteri, così come di garantire la “dimensione universale e inclusiva” della ricerca di un senso nella propria vita (Lecaldano 2016, 121). Ciò si intreccia con un antirazionalismo antropologico di fondo secondo il quale qualsiasi concezione razionalistica conduce inevitabilmente a prospettare “una recita su un testo che è già quasi del tutto scritto” (Lecaldano 2016, 67), la cui trama non contiene altro che l’attuazione di procedure di controllo delle emozioni. Una descrizione del genere fa venire in mente, per esempio, il *Kantian captain* evocato da Blackburn (Blackburn 1998).

Prima che un rilievo critico, vorrei esprimere il disagio di un lettore simpatetico, d’ispirazione illuministica, e non incline a una concezione religiosa, ma tuttavia ancora interessato a esplorare la possibilità di un’opzione razionalistica. Ciò vale in particolar modo in relazione allo stato attuale della discussione, che mostra in concreto come dal programma di una riflessione laica, illuministica e naturalistica semplicemente non segue che il razionalismo vada bandito (magari perché riproduce le caratteristiche strutturali delle concezioni teologiche). Lecaldano espone la propria posizione muovendosi in uno spazio descritto dalla tensione, o dalla contrapposizione, tra la posizione ‘negazionistica’ di Ayer, secondo cui la domanda sul senso di una vita è in effetti insensata, e quella assolutistica, che Lecaldano riconduce univocamente a una matrice teologica. Mi sembra che in questo venga trascurata la presenza consistente, nel dibattito contemporaneo, di posizioni

oggettivistiche del senso della vita che non hanno una matrice teologica.¹⁷ Non intendo lamentare la mancanza di elementi spiccatamente razionalistici nella concezione di Lecaldano; credo però che essa venga indebolita, anzitutto nella strategia argomentativa, dal rifiuto di riconoscere una plausibilità almeno *prima facie* a posizioni che si riconoscano nelle medesime esigenze a cui Lecaldano dà voce e che tuttavia non si sviluppino in direzione emotivistica.

La tendenza di Lecaldano a considerare una concezione sentimentalista l'unica opzione possibile in linea di principio conduce anche a ritenere che la sensatezza di una vita sia determinata da fattori sentimentali ed emotivi *perché* la riflessione su di essa si svolge in una prospettiva individuale. Se la domanda è radicalmente personale, non comporta che essa possa trovare risposta soltanto nelle emozioni, ma soltanto che essa assume il suo significato autentico all'interno della riflessione personale su aspetti della propria esistenza, anche se essi non sono necessariamente riducibili a dinamiche emozionali. Come ho suggerito prima, si può rendere conto della centralità esistenziale della domanda sul senso della vita anche interpretandola come un aspetto intrinseco della riflessione interna sulla propria moralità, concentrato sulle implicazioni che atteggiamenti e scelte hanno per la propria persona individuale, a partire da sue caratteristiche individuali come capacità e disposizioni.

Un secondo aspetto problematico riguarda, infine, la sostanza della concezione sentimentalistica di Lecaldano. Una prospettiva soggettivistica come la sua sembra incontrare difficoltà se si considera la possibilità che la vita di una persona sia pienamente dotata di senso, seppure quella persona non ne sia soddisfatta, o non provi l'orgoglio a cui punta l'agente secondo la ricostruzione emotivistica di Lecaldano. L'obiezione colpisce in generale sia le concezioni soggettivistiche, sia quelle cosiddette ibride, esemplificate da Susan Wolf: in entrambi i casi viene escluso che possa avere senso la vita di una persona che non prova una soddisfazione corrispondente, o nessun sentimento di realizzazione, anzitutto a causa di una valutazione falsata o inesatta della propria condotta.¹⁸ Una persona può condurre una vita pienamente sensata ma non esserne soddisfatta anche dal punto di vista interno, individuale. Ciò è particolarmente chiaro se teniamo presente il diverso esito della riflessione sulla propria esistenza in momenti diversi, anche alla luce degli stessi criteri di fondo. Per converso, la dipendenza da uno stato soggettivo di soddisfazione può implicare il rischio di qualche

¹⁷ Vedi p.es. Metz 2002, Smuts 2013, Bramble 2015.

¹⁸ Cfr. Smuts 2013; analogamente Bramble 2015, 447. Cfr. anche Loudon 2013, 32 ss.

forma di razionalizzazione (sia *ex post*, sia *ex ante*), anzitutto nei termini di un autoinganno più o meno pronunciato che in nome della coerenza con i propri progetti e della propria soddisfazione personale sminuisca la rilevanza di istanze che gli altri considererebbero importanti.¹⁹ Lecaldano osserva che è necessario prevedere il riferimento a interessi e progetti che possano ricevere l'approvazione disinteressata di uno spettatore imparziale (vedi Lecaldano 2016, 131 ss.). Tale esigenza determina un correttivo cruciale all'ammissibilità di determinati progetti personali, ma si tratta di una limitazione che, di nuovo, non è facile distinguere da vincoli morali.

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¹⁹ Si veda p.es. Lecaldano 2016, 80: "per dare un senso alle nostre vite è necessario che i desideri che ci muovono siano autentici, che cioè non inganniamo noi stessi e gli altri sulla vita che stiamo conducendo".

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IL SENSO DELLA VITA, SENZA DIO MA CON GLI ALTRI

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ABSTRACT

Following and discussing the lines of Eugenio Lecaldano's recent volume *Il senso della vita* (Bologna, Il Mulino, 2016), this paper examines the possibility of giving an account of a personal search for the meaning of one's own life in a naturalist and secular perspective. In this light, the role of emotions, moral sentiments and relationships both in stabilizing one's own sense of oneself and in the personal quest for the meaning of life are discussed.

KEYWORDS

Meaning of life, atheism, morality, personal identity, relationships.

Sono già diversi anni che Eugenio Lecaldano si propone di spiegare tratti importanti dell'esperienza umana in una prospettiva empirista e secolare, ovverosia in un quadro che non assuma l'esistenza di Dio, come fonte appunto di verità, senso o morale, ma che guardi invece solo a ciò che è attingibile attraverso i nostri sensi e alla riflessione che possiamo farvi sopra, un quadro che — come dice nel libro che qui discutiamo — non abbia bisogno di “ricorrere a elementi esterni all'universo in cui ci troviamo, cioè a elementi trascendenti, sovranaturali o, più in generale, al di là dell'esperienza comune”.¹

Già in diversi volumi Lecaldano si è interrogato sulla possibilità di riconoscere uno spazio per la morale in questo quadro, intendendo questa interrogazione come volta sia al riconoscimento della moralità come una dimensione dell'esperienza umana, legata a tratti appunto riportabili all'esperienza comune di ciò che siamo e non ad altro, sia come volta alla ricerca di norme e valori che ci guidino, che appunto possono essere rintracciati senza fare appello a una fonte di valore esterna all'esperienza umana.² In questo ultimo interessante volume, l'autore si propone

¹ E. Lecaldano, *Sul senso della vita*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2016, p. 47.

² Tra i volumi recenti si vedano: E. Lecaldano, *Un'etica senza Dio*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2006; Id., *Prima lezione di filosofia morale*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2010.

invece di mostrare come, all'interno di questo quadro stesso naturalistico e secolare, vi sia uno spazio, e come lo si possa pensare, per quella che fin dal titolo indica come "la ricerca sul senso della vita". Ovvero, come spiega nelle prime pagine del volume, come si possa dar conto – in questo quadro – non solo della possibilità di domandarsi che senso o significato abbia la propria singola esistenza, ma anche (come già anche per la sua indagine sulla morale) che tipo di risorse umane siano in gioco in questa ricerca (come vedremo un ruolo fondamentale giocheranno le emozioni, coerentemente con l'impianto humaneo che caratterizza il suo approccio, ma anche le relazioni con gli altri), e su che vie si possa (o si debba) indirizzarsi per trovare delle risposte.

Così infatti divide il suo recente volume in un primo capitolo dedicato all'*Interrogarsi*, in cui dà conto dell'esistenza di questo interrogativo circa il senso della vita e della sua sensatezza, anche in un orizzonte ateo,³ connotandolo in termini di un'esperienza psicologica personale privata, di cui tutti abbiamo contezza e che si può dire dunque, in questo senso, comune; un secondo capitolo, intitolato *Cercare*, in cui dà conto dei modi in cui possiamo, umanamente verrebbe da dire, cercare di dare risposta a questo interrogativo (se non con la religione, con la ragione o guardando alle emozioni e ad altre facoltà umane) ovvero in cui qualifica questa ricerca (distinguendola per esempio dalla riflessione morale o dalla ricerca della felicità e interrogandosi circa il ruolo della verità); e infine un capitolo, *Rispondere*, dedicato alle risposte che si possono dare a questa domanda, ovvero a modelli di risposta che hanno senso nel quadro sopradetto e che possono dar conto o risposta appunto a quell'interrogativo: risposte che rimangono – Lecaldano lo riconosce e difende questo punto – ovviamente personali e autonome, ma di cui tuttavia si possono indicare o esaminare alcuni tratti. Le risposte all'interrogativo sul senso della nostra vita, in questo quadro, non possono che essere personali, e quindi sono plurali, legate come sono a ciò a cui ciascuno annette importanza, ciononostante, nella conclusione del volume, Lecaldano sembra spingersi fino a proporre un punto di vista particolare che indichi una strada per "trovare ciò che conta per il senso della vita",⁴ spingendo quindi la sua ricerca su un versante più propositivo o normativo, con l'intento – almeno così appare – di mostrare che anche in una prospettiva laica si può considerare che alcune vite, per esempio quelle dei malvagi assoluti, non possano risultare sensate (un intento che per altro si rintraccia anche in altre parti del volume). Quest'ultimo punto, come in molti altri suoi scritti, è – credo – frutto di un impegno teso a mostrare che anche in assenza di una fonte di verità e valore assoluta (come quella che si sostiene possa provenire da Dio), e con le sole risorse umane, si possa – o addirittura si possa meglio – dare conto della distinzione tra bene e male

³ Inteso nel senso positivo proposto nel recente volume: E. Lecaldano, *Senza Dio. Storie di atei e di ateismo*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2015.

⁴ Così intitola l'ultimo paragrafo del terzo capitolo, pp. 125 e segg.

come anche del senso e del non senso della nostra vita, mostrando la fallacia della tesi che sostiene che senza quella fonte non siamo altro che condannati al relativismo o allo scetticismo e al nichilismo, e che solo in quella fonte possiamo trovare appunto risposte alle domande morali o circa la sensatezza della vita umana; questo senza pregiudicare, al contempo, il riconoscimento della pluralità dei modi di dirsi umani e di trovare senso alla propria esistenza, e anzi difendendo anche uno spazio pubblico, fatto da leggi che permettano agli individui per esempio di disporre di modi in cui esprimersi liberamente e dare senso alla loro riproduzione, alla cura della loro salute e, soprattutto, alla loro stessa morte, garantito da leggi laiche e democratiche. Interessanti in questo senso sono alcuni accenni presenti nel volume a tematiche strettamente bioetiche, anche se non sono certo queste al centro del volume.

Come altri autori prima di lui, e dialogando con alcuni di essi, Lecaldano si impegna infatti in una ricerca ambiziosa, volta a mostrare come dall'interno di un specifico quadro filosofico, una certa filosofia analitica, si possa dar conto in modo interessante e propositivo di un tratto rilevante dell'esperienza umana, uno dei più rilevanti direi, per la nostra esperienza personale, quello di resistere al senso di vuoto che a tratti ci attanaglia e trovare un motivo, un senso per cui continuare a vivere,⁵ indicando per di più - in contrapposizione con altri autori - una specifica forma di ricostruzione e proposta, che non ruota né intorno al valore della razionalità (si veda il dialogo critico che istaura con Nagel e Nozick), né al valore delle culture di appartenenza (si veda quello con Taylor), quanto piuttosto al ruolo delle capacità emotive e riflessive umane e dello scambio con gli altri.

Come in molti altri casi, leggendo questo volume di Lecaldano, mi trovo molto d'accordo sull'ipotesi di partenza e riconosco tutto l'interesse, il valore e la pregnanza della sua ricerca, anche se, una volta incamminatami sulla strada che apre, la percorrerei forse in modo diverso. Di questa diversità vorrei seppure brevemente dare conto, in questo confortata non solo da una consuetudine di scambio che ormai va avanti da molto tempo con l'autore, ma anche dalle stesse tesi di Lecaldano che riconosce un ruolo importante al confronto e alla possibilità di indicare per tutti, studiosi e lettori di filosofia o meno che si sia, la possibilità di annettere importanza a diversi tratti dell'esperienza umana. Proverò a dar conto di qualcuna di queste differenze e di qualche interrogativo, indicando ovviamente nel fatto che il volume stimoli a porsi questi interrogativi, e perfino a indicare queste differenze, una sua ricchezza ulteriore.

Dunque il precipitato dell'analisi che Lecaldano offre, se la dovessimo concentrare in poche parole, mi sembra si possa esporre come segue: Lecaldano inizia con l'indicare un'esperienza psicologica comune, quel senso di vuoto che ci spinge a cercare un senso in quel che facciamo, in quel che siamo, quella appunto della ricerca

⁵ Non posso qui che rimandare agli accurati riferimenti alla letteratura esistente sul tema presenti nel ricco apparato di note che correde il testo.

di dare un senso alla nostra vita, come qualcosa che proviene dal nostro interno e che caratterizza la nostra vita soprattutto ma non esclusivamente in certe fasi (adolescenza e vecchiaia ad esempio), come il punto di partenza della sua ricerca. Di questa esperienza vuole ragionare, non perché come studioso di filosofia abbia qualcosa di conclusivo da dire, ma – verrebbe da dire - perché un filosofo non può dirsi tale se non riesce a tenere conto e dare conto delle esperienze concrete di chi ha intorno.

Qui, prima di procedere oltre, mi limito a un breve commento: della ricchezza e non solo dell'aspetto metodologico di quest'ultima affermazione io sono molto convinta. La filosofia si nutre dell'esperienza umana e vi torna e questo scambio produce ricchezza per l'una e per l'altra. Non vi è a mio modo di vedere altro modo di intendere il fare filosofia. Ovviamente però molti sono i modi in cui questo ricco interscambio si può dare. Per esempio qui Lecaldano sembra assumere, come un dato di partenza, l'esperienza della ricerca del senso della nostra vita, come se fosse un carattere specifico degli umani, anzi una "dimensione costitutiva dell'esistenza umana" (p. 9), tanto da preoccuparsi poi in nota degli animali non umani, assumendola - sia pure nelle variazioni storiche culturali e fin di genere - come un'esperienza comune che non richiede ulteriori qualificazioni, ma che invece apre a una serie di interrogativi. Questo è un punto di partenza che come vedremo apre a riflessioni molto ricche, ma che potrebbe essere anche interrogato in modo ulteriore o diverso. Si potrebbe infatti indagare filosoficamente il dato da cui Lecaldano prende le mosse, cioè la comune esperienza del cercare un senso alla propria vita, in modo diverso e con diversa ma altrettanta efficacia, per esempio si potrebbe tentare di non assumerlo come un semplice dato di fatto da cui partire e invece provare a ricostruire quando, e come, proprio la ricca interazione tra filosofia e esperienza ha portato a considerare o far sentire questa esperienza, così definita, come una caratteristica umana: si potrebbe indagare ad esempio quand'è che (e forse anche perché) sono stati riconosciuti, proposti o inventati, a seconda dei casi, il concetto di individuo e quello della sua individuale ricerca di senso. Se ne potrebbe fare un'indagine genealogica e sarebbe un altro modo interessante di guardare all'esperienza umana e di quella odierna e occidentale in particolare.⁶ In quel che segue, però, seguirò la strada di Lecaldano, riconoscendo la presenza di quell'esperienza nella mia vita e nella vita di altri di cui ho conoscenza diretta e indiretta, tanto da poter pensare che sia una condizione comune almeno a un

⁶ Senza impegnarmi in riferimenti ampi, penso qui ad esempio alla ricerca filosofica di Bernard Williams, autore con cui Lecaldano dialoga molto anche in questo suo volume. Si veda per esempio B. Williams, *Genealogia della verità. Storia e virtù del dire il vero*, Fazi Editore, Roma, 2005. In questo testo, per altro, Williams propone un'interessante riflessione critica sulla ricerca di autenticità e sull'autotrasparenza, a partire da un confronto tra Rousseau e Diderot (cfr cap. 8), che potrebbe fare da sfondo ad alcune delle considerazioni che svilupperò più avanti.

numero rilevante di esseri umani, così come Lecaldano propone, e cercherò di seguirne i ragionamenti.

Ora il tentativo di Lecaldano è quello di mostrare come questa esperienza sia spiegabile in termini naturalistici e come in questi stessi termini si possano descrivere e suggerire le strade per cercare una risposta.

Il primo risultato che Lecaldano mette a segno è quello di sostenere che la ricerca del senso della nostra esistenza possa essere spiegata in termini naturalistici, anzi quasi che solo in questo orizzonte trovi spiegazione e senso. Siamo mossi a cercare un senso del nostro vivere, e non già della vita in generale, proprio perché siamo animali curiosi e riflessivi: questa ricerca come molte altre rimanda a una dotazione specie specifica, al modo umano di adattarsi all'ambiente. Non abbiamo bisogno di un'istanza esterna per formulare questo interrogativo, che anzi sorge in noi, date le nostre capacità, a fronte della vita e delle sue difficoltà, proprio potremmo dire a partire dalla sua casualità e finitezza. Stretti tra caso e mortalità, ma essendo animali riflessivi, cerchiamo il senso del nostro vivere, sembra suggerire Lecaldano. Non ci servono spiegazioni ulteriori per riconoscere lo spazio di questa esperienza.

Il passo successivo che Lecaldano compie è sgranare questa istanza riflessiva, di cui la filosofia (filosofia intesa qui come quella disciplina che offre una "traccia delle riflessioni più chiare, precise e fertili elaborate dagli esseri umani", così a p. 22), ha dato conto in modo diverso.

Qui si sostiene la tesi che il senso della nostra esistenza, della nostra personale esistenza, non derivi dalla riflessione o da convincimenti (inattuabili per altro empiricamente) sul senso o sul valore dell'esistenza umana in generale, come diversa per esempio da quella di altri esseri viventi, ma che possa e debba darsi invece a partire da noi e dagli altri che abbiamo intorno, ma soprattutto da noi, dai nostri desideri, da ciò che riteniamo importante per noi. E' solo, sembra dire Lecaldano, l'investimento emotivo soggettivo in un qualche impegno che può contrastare quel senso vanificante e oppressivo di insensatezza che va con la vita umana. E questi impegni, questi desideri esistono, non dobbiamo andarli a cercare razionalmente, né cercarli all'esterno (se la via dell'adesione religiosa è inutilizzabile, altrettanto lo è infatti secondo Lecaldano quella della comunità culturale come fonte di fini e senso). Si tratta dunque di mettere a tema il fatto che annettiamo valore ai nostri impegni, e un tipo di valore specifico, e di essere in contatto con questa esperienza emotiva. E' qui che, infatti, l'autore afferma chiaramente che la ricerca circa il senso della nostra esistenza è distinta dalla ricerca morale (esso non viene dall'adesione a un'ideale di vita buona), né va confusa con la ricerca della felicità o del benessere (posso non trovare un senso a quel che faccio anche se ho una vita di successo o di benessere o perfino lunghissima), piuttosto essa va pensata, almeno per un verso, come una ricerca della verità, della nostra verità o, come dice a tratti, di autenticità, intesa

appunto come un rimanere in contatto con ciò che siamo, con i nostri desideri e impegni, che riconosciamo importanti, e al contempo misurarne la realtà (e non certo come la ricerca di origini e radici e fini da rintracciare fuori di noi, come ad esempio secondo Lecaldano suggerisce Taylor). La domanda di senso della nostra esistenza si lega per Lecaldano alla domanda di stabilità del nostro io: la vita ha un senso quando e se riusciamo a riconoscerci ancora noi, con i nostri desideri e impegni, in essa. Ma poiché, nella prospettiva privilegiata da Lecaldano, il nostro io è tale in un senso molto debole, non essendo sostanziale né stabilizzato da istanze categoriche o razionali, ma humaneamente strutturato intorno a una capacità riflessiva che opera su, e lega insieme, esperienze psicologiche altrimenti non particolarmente connesse tra loro se non, e anche in questo caso momentaneamente, nella loro relazione a un corpo (p. 72), il rapporto tra identità e senso della nostra vita è particolare. Entrambi dipendono e fanno capo a questa debolezza, a cui solo un'istanza emotiva può dare stabilità, e cioè passioni e interessi stabili, in una parola il nostro carattere. Siamo la trama che riusciamo a tessere e abbiamo bisogno di conferme emotive che siamo quella trama (di qui la ricerca di senso). Conferme che siamo capaci di darci nel momento in cui ci confrontiamo con gli altri, in cui riusciamo a vedere rispecchiati, anzi meglio a sentire apprezzati, i nostri impegni. Qui dunque l'altro elemento importante dell'analisi proposta, la rilevanza delle relazioni, non intese come appartenenze culturali, ma come relazioni interpersonali, con quanti abbiamo intorno, ovvero come una più ampia dimensione intersoggettiva discorsiva e di confronto. Ovviamente, qui torna il legame con la verità: non rispondiamo alla nostra ricerca di senso se cerchiamo di apparire agli altri diversi da quelli che siamo. È in questo senso che Lecaldano, come dicevo, parla di autenticità: un tema su cui vale la pena di soffermarsi.

È in questa dinamica tra narrazione di sé e rapporti con gli altri che si giocano dunque il terreno dell'identità e quello della sensatezza della nostra vita (come anche, e ci verremo, quello della morale). La nostra narrazione di noi ha bisogno degli altri proprio perché non è strutturata intorno a qualche istanza fondamentale ma è solo il frutto di un continuo processo tenuto insieme dalle passioni e dai rispecchiamenti, come tale essa può, a fronte di cambiamenti importanti, andare in crisi ed essere ripristinata in questo gioco di specchi.

Un primo punto di dubbio, che esprimo anche per cercare di chiarire le tesi dell'autore, è che in questo gioco di specchi, l'autore iniziale della narrazione, che poi mette alla prova dell'osservazione e dell'apprezzamento degli altri oppure, come dirà nelle ultime pagine del volume, alla prova dell'osservazione da parte di un sé sdoppiato che "valuti il senso della biografia che stiamo costruendo" (p. 132), sembra essere per Lecaldano lo stesso io, lo stesso soggetto, mentre io (cioè io che scrivo) vedrei in una costruzione simile, un ruolo maggiore anche per gli altri, per le narrazioni degli altri su di noi. Siamo la nostra storia dice, ad esempio, Cavarero

rileggendo Hannah Arendt e Karen Blixen, ma non necessariamente ne siamo gli autori.⁷ Non voglio qui scomodare la psicoanalisi, ma certo per esempio molto si potrebbe dire su come siamo abitati dagli altri, o anche tenuti insieme dagli altri (penso per esempio a letture della psicoanalisi relazionale o del sé, da Winnicott a Kohut, come particolarmente interessanti e perspicue). Per dirla in una parola trovo un io ancora troppo individualistico in questo pur poroso io che cerca il suo senso descritto da Lecaldano, per l'appunto in termini di autenticità e autorialità. Tra l'altro molto poco è indagato come vada in crisi questa narrazione e come la si ristruttururi, a tratti sembra quasi che la narrazione sia un filo unico che viene perso e recuperato e mai mutato.

Qui si aprono una serie di interessanti questioni, ne menzionerò solo alcune.

Nel legare strettamente l'instabilità dell'identità e la ricerca del senso della propria vita, Lecaldano corre il rischio di aprire lo spazio al conformismo, ma lo evita proprio postulando un accesso privilegiato di noi al nostro essere, ai nostri impegni e valori o scelte, per cui non possiamo essere fieri di noi, perché questo è in fondo il punto (è l'orgoglio, humanamente, la passione che opera principalmente), se siamo riconosciuti e apprezzati per qualcosa che sappiamo non vero di noi, ma appunto frutto di una mera adesione – conformista - a qualcosa di esterno a noi, in una mera ricerca di apprezzamento. Ma il punto su cui vorrei richiamare l'attenzione è che nel proporre questa tesi Lecaldano sembra assumere molto circa la nostra possibilità di esserci trasparenti e sembra non riconoscere il ruolo di ciò che ci muove al di sotto o al di sopra della nostra coscienza, dell'inconscio da una parte, dei condizionamenti culturali dall'altra.⁸ Questo invece è il terreno di sabbia su cui, a mio avviso, ci muoviamo e su cui operiamo.

Per muoversi su questo terreno sabbioso io, ad esempio, tenterei una proposta diversa. Farei riferimento piuttosto alla diversità di piani che sono in gioco, alle diverse componenti che fanno il nostro senso di noi e possono portarci a riconoscere di volta in volta la sensatezza della nostra esistenza e che, nella loro interazione, contrastano un'ipotesi di un mero conformismo: tratti interni, i nostri desideri, consci e inconsci, impegni e fini; le caratteristiche del nostro modo di essere, definite e stabilizzate attraverso il confronto con gli altri (e non necessariamente moralizzate o positive: alcuni tratti della nostra personalità come la timidezza o la spavalderia contribuiscono a stabilizzare il nostro senso di noi senza necessariamente essere apprezzate ma solo perché ci sono stabilmente riconosciute o ascritte dagli altri);

⁷ A. Cavarero, *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti. Filosofia della narrazione*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1997.

⁸ Circa questa considerazione su trasparenza e autenticità si può discutere ad esempio dell'affermazione che fa *en passant* sul fatto che non si possa trovare il senso in una vita virtuale, quando il numero di *Like* che i ragazzi ricevono quando mettono sul loro profilo facebook una loro foto, scatena orgoglio (e endorfine, se ci vogliamo muovere su un altro piano), in misura più che considerevole.

quindi il riconoscimento che riceviamo nelle relazioni interpersonali o di affetto e il nostro impegno in esse e, infine, i riconoscimenti e gli impegni di natura sociale (qui, oltre al ruolo, negativo se vogliamo, ma inevitabile, dei “condizionamenti” sociali, si potrebbe anche considerare il ruolo positivo che - al di là della dimensione morale autonoma indicata da Lecaldano - possono avere, rispetto alla sensatezza della nostra esistenza, il sentirsi parte di qualcosa di più grande di sé o il sentirsi e riconoscersi “di parte”, per esempio nella dimensione politica).

Non che questa ricchezza di piani non sia presente nell’analisi di Lecaldano, per esempio del valore di relazioni affettive funzionanti parla in diversi luoghi (per es. a p. 112), ma mi pare anche che la sua analisi si articoli in modo diverso da quella cui ho, sia pure così brevemente, accennato.

Mi pare infatti di poter dire che Lecaldano prenda infine un’altra strada, che riguarda la morale. Pur avendo distinto infatti la ricerca del senso dalla riflessione sulla moralità, come due ricerche o spazi specifici e distinti, più volte nel corso del volume, egli le intreccia. Di fatto, per esempio, vuole provare a sostenere che vite malvagie siano prive di senso e non in generale, come specifica, ma nel privato del singolo malvagio, a meno che questi non sia (come secondo lui sono stati Hitler, Eichman e i nazisti) un sociopatico (pp. 56-57) e, d’altra parte, che proprio l’impegno verso gli altri, in una qualche forma personalmente e liberamente scelta (e non dettata da autorità esterne), sia il nucleo portante attorno a cui possiamo costruire la risposta di senso circa la nostra vita. Si veda in questo senso il passo che introduce il paragrafo conclusivo del volume: “la nostra impostazione afferma la centralità dell’autonomia e della specificità di ciascuna esistenza umana, declinandola all’interno di un pluralismo che riconosce che il senso di un’esistenza starà prevalentemente nella capacità con cui essa si svilupperà – com’è tipico di un essere progressivo quel è l’essere umano – sulla base del carattere di quella specifica persona. Nucleo portante di questo carattere, che includerà varie capacità riflessive – e dunque anche quelle legate all’etica e alla ricerca del benessere –, sarà un impegno responsabile sia a ridurre le quantità di sofferenze dell’umanità in generale sia ad accrescerne la libertà il benessere e la culture”(p. 125).

Qui sembra essere postulato, dunque, un legame forte tra la dimensione personale della sensatezza della propria esistenza e la dimensione della morale.⁹ Entrambi

⁹ Non darò qui conto delle linee di continuità (molte) e discontinuità (qualcuna) che ho già sviluppato circa la ricostruzione della morale proposta, nei suoi diversi volumi, da Lecaldano, e qui ripresa (si vedano C. Botti, “Il sentimentalismo e le grammatiche del piacere”, in *Iride*, 2011, 64, XXIV, pp. 667-673, C. Botti, *Prospettive femministe. Morale, bioetica e vita quotidiana*, Mimesis, Milano, 2014, capp. 3). Linee che pur nella continuità vedono fundamentalmente una differenza di accenti sulla porosità della soggettività alle relazioni e ai contesti, sulla opacità o trasparenza della stessa, che aprono a una riflessione sulla morale diversa in qualche punto da quella sviluppata da Lecaldano, differenze che pure potrebbero avere rilevanza in una discussione sulla relazione tra senso di sé e della propria vita e moralità, ma di cui non dico molto ora, perché appunto ne ho già detto altrove, limitandomi qui

questi spazi, quello della ricerca del senso della propria vita e quelle della morale, sono caratterizzati infatti, secondo l'autore, da una ricerca riflessiva che ambisce o quantomeno simula (attraverso l'immaginazione) l'intersoggettività,¹⁰ sia pure - concede Lecaldano - avendo un diverso punto di attivazione o oggetto: in un caso guarderemo (impersonalmente, con l'immaginazione) alla nostra condotta verso gli altri, nell'altro alla stabilità del nostro carattere e dei nostri impegni e in questo senso alle nostre attività. Quindi in qualche modo - mi pare si possa provare a rendere così la proposta di Lecaldano - queste ricerche troveranno un loro punto di forza nella loro stessa convergenza, una convergenza che però - e questo è il punto che io vorrei provare a sollevare - non si può sempre presumere poiché appunto sono ricerche distinte. Personalmente questa distinzione non mi disturba nonostante essa apra, ahinoi, all'idea che anche i cattivi possano riempire il vuoto esistenziale e trovare senso in quel che fanno, mentre mi domando se questo sia un problema per Lecaldano. Tenere i due spazi separati apre infatti, a mio avviso, alla possibilità di pensare che "i cattivi" possano essere considerati immorali, piuttosto che dei sociopatici, ovvero che si possa considerare che non tutte le persone immorali sono sociopatiche, altrimenti non vi sarebbe spazio per la trasformazione la crescita e la speranza di una umanità migliore. Questa distinzione di livelli rimanda però al fatto che il senso della nostra vita sia pure elaborato in prima persona ma in dialogo con altri, sia attingibile a partire da una serie di impegni che non necessariamente sono apprezzabili da un punto di vista morale, o perché non hanno a che fare con piani di rilevanza morale ovvero quando essi siano criticabili da un punto di vista morale.

a ragionare solo sulla questione della relazione tra senso di sé e moralità per come è proposta da Lecaldano in questo testo.

¹⁰ Rispetto a questo punto e alle tesi presenti nella conclusione del volume si può far presente che c'è un interessante gioco tra l'idea di intersoggettività ricostruita lungo una linea smithiana, quella dell'osservatore ideale imperziale, per così dire più regolativa, e quella dell'approvazione intersoggettiva nel senso del "narrow circle" humeano, più contestuale, che si potrebbe percorrere utilmente.

UN'ESILE SIGNIFICANZA: EUGENIO LECALDANO SUL SENSO DELLA VITA

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I examine Eugenio Lecaldano's way of tackling the issue of the meaning of life. I highlight the dependence of his individualistic approach on the specific character of the person who inquires into the meaning of life. I also sketch a weaker way of understanding the meaning of life as an attempt to provide reasons which are valid from the standpoint of the present, and which will make us continue living.

KEYWORDS

E. Lecaldano, narrative identity, character, calm passion, David Hume, Bernard Williams

Non ci si lasci ingannare dalla relativa brevità di *Sul senso della vita*, né dalla gradevolezza della lettura. Infatti, sebbene esso si rivolga a un pubblico ampio e non solo di addetti ai lavori, si tratta di un libro di filosofia a tutti gli effetti (come d'altronde avviene, inevitabilmente, con tutti gli scritti di Eugenio Lecaldano), con una prospettiva potente, un'argomentazione serrata e una letteratura secondaria imponente. Vediamone brevemente i punti più importanti.

Per Lecaldano è senz'altro legittimo porsi una domanda riguardante il senso della vita: essa non è scalfita né dalle perplessità nei confronti dello statuto del significato, espresse soprattutto dalla filosofia analitica nella prima metà del Novecento, né da un atteggiamento nichilista di indifferenza verso la condizione umana, proprio di un certo pensiero esistenzialista. Ma la risposta, a suo avviso, non può mai giungere da prospettive di senso esterne alle vite dei singoli, come è il caso, per esempio, delle proposte che vengono dalle religioni: “[d]a un punto di vista empirista,” – che è quello di Lecaldano – “credere in Dio o in qualche forma di immortalità non è sufficiente per dare un senso alla

propria vita in un modo condivisibile”.¹ D'altra parte, il senso della vita è irriducibile anche alla riflessione etica: questo senso “[c]oinvolge comunque una dimensione di valore, ma si tratta di un valore specifico, che non ha niente a che vedere con l'accettabilità morale”.² Ciò avviene perché la moralità richiede che ci si ponga da un punto di vista universale che si rivela inconciliabile con la natura individuale del senso della vita: non è il senso della vita in generale, precisa Lecaldano, che si va cercando, ma il senso della *nostra* vita in quanto siamo certe persone specifiche. Questo non vuol dire che si debba restare indifferenti di fronte alle richieste dell'etica – la sofferenza degli altri è qualcosa che conta, così come il rispetto della loro libertà –; ma solo che, in ultima istanza, non è dall'etica che la risposta potrà venire. La ricerca del senso della vita è un'impresa che si pone in una dimensione collettiva di valori e significati condivisi: “[l]a riflessione sul senso della vita, anche quando [...] coinvolge esclusivamente la propria personale esistenza, si colloca comunque in uno spazio pubblico, aprendosi a una dimensione discorsiva e di confronto”.³ Questa dimensione comune è fondamentale, perché stabilisce i limiti e i criteri all'interno dei quali possiamo interrogarci sulle nostre vite. La tesi centrale di Lecaldano è però che la domanda sul senso della vita è irrimediabilmente personale: alla fine sono sempre i singoli ad avere l'ultima parola.

Lecaldano ritiene che se è possibile attribuire un senso alla vita delle persone, esso debba darsi all'interno di un orizzonte inevitabilmente finito e concluso come quello di creature mortali quali sono gli esseri umani; in linea con quanto afferma Bernard Williams,⁴ anche Lecaldano è convinto che l'immortalità svuoterebbe di significato la vita delle persone, facendo loro perdere quei legami emotivi con loro stesse e con coloro che le circondano che danno pienezza alla loro esistenza. Ma di quale esistenza si tratta? Quale concezione dell'identità personale è necessaria perché la vita possa acquisire senso? Quella delineata da Lecaldano è una concezione 'leggera', e rimanda a un'interpretazione in termini narrativi dell'identità personale, nella versione elaborata da David Hume.⁵ Come Hume, anche Lecaldano è convinto che la continuità e la stabilità del nostro io non siano determinate da alcunché di sostanziale, come ad esempio un'anima, ma da quei legami psicologici che

¹ E. Lecaldano, *Sul senso della vita*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2016, p. 39.

² E. Lecaldano, *Sul senso della vita*, cit., p. 53.

³ E. Lecaldano, *Sul senso della vita*, cit., p. 17.

⁴ B. Williams, *Il caso Makropulos: riflessioni sul tedio dell'immortalità*, in *Problemi dell'io* (1973), Milano, Il Saggiatore, 1990, pp. 101–124.

⁵ Sull'interpretazione narrativa dell'identità personale in Hume rimando a L. Greco, *The Self as Narrative in Hume*, in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 53(4) (2015), pp. 699–722.

tengono insieme i vari momenti delle nostre vite in un flusso omogeneo. Essi ci permettono di raccontare le nostre esistenze secondo storie che acquistano coerenza grazie al nostro interrogarci su noi stessi, sul posto che occupiamo nella circostanza storica e sociale in cui ci troviamo a vivere e sui rapporti che intratteniamo con gli altri. Lecaldano sottolinea, con Hume, che “[l]a ricerca sul significato della nostra vita può essere indirizzata sulla strada giusta se, invece di affrontarla come una faccenda intellettuale da analizzare solo con il ragionamento, guardiamo a quella parte di noi stessi costituita da desideri, emozioni e passioni”.⁶ Vale a dire, la narrazione che diamo delle nostre vite acquista senso perché la carichiamo emotivamente, producendo così una biografia organica in cui passato, presente e futuro si intrecciano in un ordito significativo. Il passato che abbiamo vissuto acquista senso a partire da ciò che siamo diventati al presente e da ciò che per noi ora conta, mentre il nostro futuro si struttura a partire dagli scopi e dagli obiettivi che ci diamo adesso e che riteniamo importanti per il nostro sviluppo: “ci interroghiamo sul senso della nostra vita proprio perché sentiamo la necessità di riconoscere in essa una trama, una serie di eventi dei quali poter essere orgogliosi e non vergognarci. Ed è proprio nella possibilità di provare orgoglio perché gli altri ci apprezzano che l’esigenza di dare alla nostra vita futura uno sviluppo per noi sensato può trovare quello spessore emotivo in grado di motivare i nostri sforzi”.⁷

Hume rappresenta la maggiore fonte d’ispirazione di Lecaldano. Ma non è l’unica: ad esempio, a influenzarlo è anche Charles Darwin, da cui riprende l’idea che la ricerca del senso della vita non possa prescindere dal fatto che la condizione degli esseri umani è il frutto di circostanze assolutamente casuali e non risponde a un progetto preesistente o a un disegno razionale di alcun tipo. In questa stessa linea va visto inoltre il riferimento frequente che Lecaldano fa a Williams: anche per lui le vite individuali sono radicalmente contingenti ed esposte alla sorte. Un’altra convinzione che si ritrova in Williams, e che Lecaldano fa sua, è quella per cui affinché la narrazione delle nostre vite sia autentica essa deve realizzarsi alla luce di credenze che siano verificabili empiricamente e che possano trovare conferma all’interno di una dimensione collettiva. Infine, l’indagine di Lecaldano è debitrice dell’insegnamento di John Stuart Mill e della sua maniera di concepire l’utilitarismo, inteso come una ricerca della felicità collettiva che si accorda con il tentativo delle persone di perfezionare le loro vite.

⁶ E. Lecaldano, *Sul senso della vita*, cit., p. 73.

⁷ E. Lecaldano, *Sul senso della vita*, cit., p. 74.

Si noti che il titolo del libro di Lecaldano è ‘sul’ senso della vita, non ‘il’ senso della vita. E non può che essere così: data l’impostazione individualistica che lo contraddistingue, una domanda diretta, che possa identificare un senso univoco, chiaro e definitivo non può più aversi. Dal momento che questa domanda è “una faccenda personale, interna e psicologica”,⁸ essa si traduce piuttosto in un’interrogazione, che compiamo giorno dopo giorno, su ciò che dà significato al nostro agire. In questa direzione, peraltro, va anche Williams quando osserva che la propria esistenza va sempre vista “da qui”,⁹ dal presente. Williams parla al riguardo di “desideri categorici”,¹⁰ desideri cioè che pongono le condizioni perché la nostra esistenza possa procedere, fornendoci le motivazioni per continuare a vivere. (Un caso di desiderio categorico, per Williams, è quello dell’aspirante suicida che decida di non uccidersi più: senza il desiderio di continuare a vivere, la sua esistenza avrebbe avuto termine.)

Se però tutto questo è vero, credo che interrogarsi sul senso della propria esistenza perda parte della forza che invece gli riconosce Lecaldano. Se infatti vale la sua interpretazione psicologica, mi sembra che ciò di cui si va in cerca sia appunto (come sostiene Williams) qualcosa che ci dia delle ragioni per sopravvivere – qualcosa che è molto vicino al desiderio di essere felici, e che Lecaldano considera affine ma in definitiva differente dalla specifica indagine sul senso della propria vita.¹¹ Mentre penso che la distinzione che Lecaldano stabilisce tra senso della vita e valore morale sia convincente, come anche il suo rifiuto di soluzioni metafisico-religiose, mi persuade di meno la distinzione tra ricerca del senso della vita e ricerca della felicità – a meno che non si intenda con ‘felicità’ il mero piacere della soddisfazione dei sensi; basta però avere una nozione più articolata di piacere e dolore (come per esempio quella di Mill), ed ecco che la distinzione tra ricerca di un senso per la (propria) vita e ricerca della (propria) felicità si fa più confusa. Forse quello che cerchiamo quando ci interroghiamo sul senso della vita è proprio la nostra felicità, da intendersi come quell’equilibrio interiore, riflessivamente rafforzato, che è l’unica risposta che Hume individuava contro il “furfante scaltro”.¹² Se la questione del senso

⁸ E. Lecaldano, *Sul senso della vita*, cit., p. 122.

⁹ B. Williams, *Sorte morale*, in *Sorte morale* (1981), Milano, Il Saggiatore, 1987, pp. 33–57.

¹⁰ B. Williams, *Il caso Makropulos*, cit., e *Persone, carattere e moralità*, in *Sorte morale*, cit., pp. 9–31.

¹¹ “L’orizzonte della ricerca di una vita sensata impone di dare rilevanza a un criterio interpersonale che invece non è riconoscibile nell’ambito della ricerca di una vita felice”. E. Lecaldano, *Sul senso della vita*, cit., p. 59.

¹² Hume si misura con la sfida presentata dal furfante scaltro – cioè da colui il quale, “in casi particolari, può pensare che un atto di iniquità o di infedeltà potrà aumentare considerevolmente la sua fortuna, senza causare qualche rilevante violazione della unione che

della vita è ridotta a una questione personale che riguarda i nostri sentimenti (e con 'ridotta' non intendo dire sminuita, bensì risolta), mi sembra perciò che quello che stiamo davvero facendo sia cercare ragioni per le nostre azioni e per ciò che vogliamo essere, ragioni che contribuiscano a renderci felici e che saremo disposti a riconoscere come buone ragioni dopo averle sottoposte a uno scrutinio riflessivo.

Ragioni di questo tipo non possono aversi indipendentemente dal rapporto che abbiamo con le persone che ci sono attorno: esse saranno buone ragioni per noi, ma per essere tali devono poter essere, se non accettate, almeno riconosciute come possibili ragioni anche da altri. Può aversi un punto di vista collettivo, che permetta di identificare ragioni che siano buone per tutti? Ci si potrebbe per esempio riferire a quello che Hume chiamava un punto di vista "fermo e generale" o "comune".¹³ Secondo Hume, grazie a esso è possibile andare al di là delle idiosincrasie individuali e fare appello a una prospettiva condivisa e normativamente cogente per appurare quali tratti del carattere vanno considerati virtù e quali invece vizi. Il punto di vista comune humeano stabilisce il vocabolario morale; ma è ugualmente valido per determinare qual è il senso della vita? Si è visto che per Lecaldano il punto di vista dell'etica non è efficace a questo scopo. È vero, non viviamo vite isolate, per cui avremo bisogno dell'aiuto degli altri per chiarire a noi stessi ciò che è bene e ciò che è male, così come avremo bisogno degli altri per mettere alla prova quelli che riteniamo essere i nostri desideri e gli scopi che perseguiamo nel tentativo di vivere una vita sensata. Ma per quest'ultimo caso la portata dell'appello a qualcosa di condiviso è limitata, perché in definitiva è l'individuo che sceglie riguardo alla propria vita, e la sua scelta non deve rendere conto di nulla che vada al di là di lui stesso. Quella che potrebbe essere una buona ragione per me – per me ora tutto considerato, nel momento in cui la riconosco come tale – potrebbe non esserla per altri e in linea di principio potrebbe non esserla dal

tiene insieme la società" – nella sezione 9 della *Ricerca sui principi della morale* (1751), in Hume, *Opere filosofiche*, a cura di E. Lecaldano, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1987, vol. 2. Il dibattito che si è creato attorno alla figura del *sensible knave* è ampio e non è questo il luogo per affrontarlo; per una discussione della risposta humeana rinvio a L. Greco, *A Powerless Conscience: Hume on Reflection and Acting Conscientiously*, in *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 2017, <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09608788.2016.1249334>>.

¹³ D. Hume, *Trattato sulla natura umana*, libro 3, parte 3, sezione 1, in Hume, *Opere filosofiche*, cit., vol. 1, e Hume, *Ricerca sui principi della morale*, cit., sezione 9.

punto di vista comune.¹⁴ Nondimeno, fintantoché mi convince, essa resta per me una buona ragione, facendomi continuare a vivere.

Pertanto, più che di investigazione sul senso della nostra vita ritengo che sia più corretto parlare di un'ininterrotta esigenza di buone ragioni da parte di ognuno di noi, espresse dal punto di vista presente – dati gli individui specifici che siamo diventati, con i desideri e gli scopi che in questo momento ci guidano. Esse possono comporsi in un quadro più ampio che dà senso alle nostre vite, ma non è necessario che sia così. Queste ragioni sono variabili e dipendono in larga parte dalle circostanze. Esse sono anche relative alla persona che siamo nel momento in cui esprimiamo un giudizio su noi stessi e sulla nostra vita. Il nostro carattere, e con esso l'atteggiamento che abbiamo nei confronti dell'esistenza e del suo senso, cambiano nel tempo, per cui l'identità pratica dell'individuo e di conseguenza la richiesta di senso sono molto più fragili di quanto si vorrebbe.¹⁵

Si potrebbe ribattere che adottando una concezione narrativa dell'identità personale, come quella humeana che Lecaldano adotta, la richiesta di senso diventa essa stessa ciò che dà unità al nostro io. Ma anche in questo caso le cose non sono così semplici. Alcuni ritengono che la nostra identità non presenti la congruenza e la progressione proprie di una narrazione, per cui questa concezione in realtà non funzionerebbe.¹⁶ Senza entrare nel merito delle critiche che le sono state mosse, ci si limiti a osservare che essa può comunque benissimo ammettere l'esistenza di vite la cui narrazione è spesso interrotta, spezzata, in cui la sensatezza ora c'è, ora viene meno; vale a dire, non è necessario presupporre che la storia della nostra vita segua un percorso coerente perché la concezione narrativa dell'identità personale sia persuasiva. Una possibile soluzione per ovviare a questa mancanza di compiutezza potrebbe essere quella di richiamarsi a un'altra nozione introdotta da Hume,

¹⁴ Si prenda ad esempio il caso di Gauguin descritto da Williams in *Sorte morale*, cit., il quale decide di abbandonare la propria famiglia, comportandosi così in maniera moralmente esecrabile, per perseguire con successo i suoi progetti di artista.

¹⁵ Si prenda ad esempio il caso, presentato da D. Parfit in *Ragioni e persone* (1984), Milano, Il Saggiatore, 1989, capitolo 15, sezione 110, del russo del 19° secolo. Da giovane, egli è pronto a donare la vasta fortuna che dovrà ereditare ai contadini, al punto da stipulare un contratto legale in questo senso che potrà essere revocato solo con il consenso di sua moglie. Tuttavia, una volta raggiunta la mezza età, il russo cambia idea e rinnega gli ideali della persona che egli stesso era – ideali che allora, quando era un giovane socialista, riempivano di significato la sua esistenza e che ora, invece, non hanno per lui alcun valore.

¹⁶ Ad esempio G. Strawson, *Against Narrativity*, in *The Self?*, a cura di G. Strawson, Oxford, Blackwell, 2005, pp. 63–86.

quella di “passione calma”.¹⁷ Si tratta di passioni persistenti che agiscono sotto traccia, senza essere sempre evidenti a colui il quale le possiede. Esse, secondo Hume, sono sufficientemente forti da strutturare il carattere delle persone, dando loro una motivazione a perseguire certi obiettivi che rimane costante senza sfumare con il passare del tempo. Il desiderio di vivere una vita che abbia senso potrebbe allora corrispondere a una passione di questo tipo: per cui alcuni potrebbero, in effetti, essere guidati da una passione calma che fornisce unità alle loro vite nel tempo e che permette loro di guardare all'esistenza come a qualcosa a cui va attribuito un significato. Si dà il caso che alcuni possiedano queste passioni calme, mentre altri no; ma allora può darsi che, se è sensato parlare di senso della vita, ciò sia dovuto al fatto che colui il quale si esprime in questi termini ha un carattere di un certo tipo – si tratta di qualcuno che guarda alla propria esistenza come a un progetto che deve avere un senso compiuto e che è tenuto insieme da quel senso. Il punto sembrerebbe quindi che solo coloro i quali possiedono questo tipo di carattere – vale a dire, solo coloro i quali sono guidati da quella specifica passione calma che ne organizza il carattere – concepiranno la loro vita come qualcosa che richieda un senso. Se questo è vero, la domanda sul senso della vita potrebbe apparire del tutto sensata ad alcuni, ma niente affatto ad altri. Le passioni delle persone variano e con esse anche i caratteri,¹⁸ per cui l'atteggiamento che si ha nei confronti della propria esistenza, e dell'esistenza in generale, può anch'esso variare grandemente, sia da persona a persona, sia per una stessa persona nel corso della sua esistenza: la vita può essere vista come qualcosa che vada caricato di senso, oppure può essere vissuta senza attribuirgli alcuno scopo.

I dubbi che ho sollevato circa la maniera di intendere il senso della vita da parte di Lecaldano potrebbero essere messi da parte come il frutto di una mera controversia verbale: in fondo, Lecaldano e io sosterremmo la stessa cosa. Alla fine del libro, infatti, Lecaldano riassume la sua posizione in questo modo: “la nostra impostazione afferma la centralità dell'autonomia e della specificità di ciascuna esistenza umana, declinandola all'interno di un pluralismo che riconosce che il senso di un'esistenza starà prevalentemente nella capacità con cui essa si svilupperà – come è tipico di un essere progressivo qual è l'essere

¹⁷ D. Hume, *Tattato sulla natura umana*, cit., libro 2, parte 3, sezione 8, e D. Hume, *Dissertazione sulle passioni* (1757), sezione 5, in D. Hume, *Opere filosofiche*, cit., vol. 2.

¹⁸ Si pensi alle differenze che corrono tra i quattro caratteri dello stoico, del platonico, dell'epicureo e dello scettico descritti da Hume, e discussi anche da Lecaldano, *Sul senso della vita*, cit., capitolo 3, sezione 2. Hume presenta i quattro caratteri in quattro saggi omonimi (1742). Si veda D. Hume, *Opere filosofiche*, cit., vol. 3.

umano – sulla base del carattere di quella specifica persona”.¹⁹ Una definizione di questo tipo è sufficientemente ampia da accogliere anche la significanza più esile che ho provato a descrivere. Ma Lecaldano prosegue: “[n]ucleo portante di questo carattere, che includerà varie capacità riflessive – e dunque anche quelle legate all’etica e alla ricerca del benessere –, sarà un impegno responsabile sia a ridurre la quantità di sofferenze dell’umanità in generale sia ad accrescere la libertà, il benessere e la cultura”.²⁰ Ora, tutto questo è certamente condivisibile, ma rivela come il senso della vita, nella maniera in cui la intende Lecaldano (una maniera che riecheggia quella di Mill), sia perseguito solo da qualcuno con un carattere ben preciso. Di più: il fatto stesso che una domanda di questo tipo – ‘qual è il significato della mia vita?’ – appaia come densa di senso dipenderà dal possesso di quel carattere. Per una simile persona la domanda sul senso della vita sarà una domanda sensata, e lei avrà perciò motivo di organizzare la sua vita secondo un progetto che le dà senso: nella visione di Lecaldano, una vita sensata sarà una vita ricca di esperienze, che consiste in una tensione verso un sempre maggiore sviluppo della propria individualità in armonia con il rispetto degli altri esseri umani e con l’incremento della felicità generale. Si tratta di un’aspirazione nobile e si possono avanzate ottime ragioni per coltivare una tale passione calma; ma ciò non toglie che se essa finisce per valere per quella persona lì, potrebbe non far risuonare nessuna corda in altri, per i quali invece impostare la propria esistenza come uno spazio concettuale in cui andare alla ricerca di un senso così descritto – o di un senso qualsivoglia – non avrà alcun significato.

In questo intervento ho sostenuto che sebbene l’approccio individualista che Lecaldano difende sia molto convincente, esso è tuttavia pienamente appropriato solo per persone che considerano la vita come qualcosa che vada effettivamente riempita di significato. Ho anche tratteggiato un’accezione più debole di senso della vita, per la quale essa è un tentativo continuo, fatto sempre dal punto di vista presente, di essere felici, che consiste nel darsi ragioni che resistano a uno scrutinio riflessivo e che ci permettano di continuare a vivere.

¹⁹ E. Lecaldano, *Sul senso della vita*, cit., p. 125.

²⁰ E. Lecaldano, *Sul senso della vita*, cit., p. 125.

IL SENSO DELLA VITA: LA RISPOSTA È DENTRO DI TE, MA POTREBBE ESSERE QUELLA SBAGLIATA

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I offer some critical reflections on E. Lecaldano, *Sul senso della vita* (Bologna, Il Mulino, 2016). I mainly focus on three concepts: subject, individual, and autonomy and suggest that the problem of the meaning of life can be better addressed using a no-individualistic approach.

KEYWORDS

E. Lecaldano, subject, individual, autonomy, David Hume, immortality.

Per molti, e credo che Eugenio Lecaldano¹ sia tra questi, interrogarsi sul senso della vita (SDV) coinvolge almeno tre dimensioni: quella autobiografica, quella soggettiva (che alla prima si sovrappone, ma non è detto vi si identifichi), quella dell'autonomia personale. Inevitabilmente alcune delle considerazioni che svolgerò provengono, perciò, dal mio vissuto individuale, ma penso di essere autorizzato in un qualche senso dallo stesso Lecaldano ad utilizzarle.² Vorrei interrogare ognuna di queste tre dimensioni, poiché sembrerebbe che possano effettivamente esaurire il dominio di questa importante domanda. E lo esaurirebbero, va da sé, non dal punto di vista delle soluzioni empiriche, fattuali, soggettive che a questa domanda possono essere date, bensì dal punto di vista del significato del concetto di SDV, ossia dal punto di vista delle sue proprietà operative.

Una delle dimensioni operative di questo concetto è quello di essere interrogato principalmente a partire dal nostro punto di vista. Questo non significa che nel punto di vista individuale debba esaurirsi.³ È noto, infatti, che a questo problema, forse ineliminabile, sono state date molte soluzioni che individuali non sono: il SDV per alcuni (per molti) è nella trascendenza dell'immortalità di cui parlano alcune religioni; oppure il SDV è nella nazione, nella comunità, nella razza. Queste soluzioni

¹ E. Lecaldano, *Sul senso della vita*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2016.

² E. Lecaldano, *Sul senso della vita*, cit., p. 9.

³ E. Lecaldano, *Sul senso della vita*, cit., pp. 14-21.

sono state probabilmente numericamente prevalenti nella storia dell'umanità, una storia recente, tutto sommato. Quanto all'estensione del SDV, ossia all'insieme di oggetti ai quali si può applicare il concetto di SDV, questo è indefinito proprio in virtù della vaghezza della sua definizione. Questa vaghezza è sia una sfida per l'immaginazione, almeno per noi, che viviamo in una dimensione individualistica, sia la constatazione di una circostanza ineludibile, la quale è appunto la necessità del punto di partenza autobiografico per sondare il problema del SDV. È, perciò, inevitabile, anche quando se ne scrive per discutere assieme a Lecaldano, fare riferimento alla propria esperienza personale e a quanto del passato si ricorda a questo proposito per capire alcune cose: se a questo problema abbiamo dato la dovuta importanza, se costituisce ancora un problema per noi, se il fatto che magari non costituisca più un problema dipende dal fatto che una risposta al SDV l'abbiamo data oppure lo riteniamo un problema irrisolvibile o, addirittura, irrilevante.

Quando, grazie a Lecaldano, sono stato costretto a reinterrogarmi su un problema al quale da molto tempo non avevo più pensato (forse dai tempi dell'adolescenza) non mi sono venute in mente soluzioni, bensì delle immagini specifiche, ossia quelle che ritraggono una piccola star di Instagram, Angela Nikolau. Nikolau (che non ha certo i milioni di follower, ad esempio, di Gianluca Vacchi, che, naturalmente, al problema del SDV ha da dare una sua risposta) è divenuta relativamente famosa per le incredibili foto che la ritraggono sulla sommità di altissimi edifici mentre si affaccia, senza protezione apparente, sul vuoto. Io soffro di vertigini, forse sin da quando piccolissimo precipitai da un balcone a tre metri di altezza, mi fratturai il cranio e sopravvissi miracolosamente (che è un'altra maniera, per noi abitanti dell'Occidente individualistico e privo oramai della credenza nella provvidenza divina, per dire 'casualmente'). Guardare le foto di Nikolau mi risulta molto difficile. Eppure è innegabile che io, come molti altri, vi sono attratto. Lo stesso mi è accaduto ora nel riflettere sul SDV a partire dalla sollecitazione di Lecaldano. Mi è parso un problema quasi impossibile da affrontare coerentemente, almeno in una prospettiva che non coinvolga credenze religiose, appartenenze nazionali e/o comunitarie, supposte appartenenze razziali. Certo, alcune di queste alternative sono semplicemente per noi innominabili. Nessuno di noi, che ci troviamo qui a discutere con Lecaldano, trova il SDV impresso nei tatuaggi della "Arian Brotherhood", perché sappiamo che il razzismo non ha nessuna base scientifica ed è una credenza con orribili conseguenze morali. Pensiamo, forse, cose *grosso modo* simili di un nazionalismo spinto oltre certi limiti (nient'affatto semplici da definire, per altro: io a titolo precauzionale continuo a pensare che quanto prima le nazioni vanno in malora tanto meglio è), così come di un comunitarismo che può confinare con il settarismo e l'esclusivismo (e coinvolgere anche la dimensione religiosa).

Eppure, la vertigine del SDV ha una sua forza di attrazione. Forse, questo accade per ciascuno di noi in momenti particolari e non sempre. Quando viviamo un'esperienza di delusione che coinvolge i nostri progetti più intimi, questa domanda

può risorgere, perché la delusione potrebbe sembrarci incoerente con i nostri fini e metterli in questione. Quando viviamo delle esperienze intense, invece, queste sembrano incorporare in sé il proprio senso, anche quando non sono propriamente esperienze con un contenuto semantico preciso, come accade con la musica, che effettivamente pare racchiudere in certi momenti un universo sensato e completo, come anche Lecaldano incidentalmente ricorda.⁴ Ma è proprio così? Quando Beethoven compose la *Sinfonia n. 3 Eroica*, la dedicò a Napoleone. Beethoven credeva forse di aver vissuto una esperienza piena di SDV, come Hegel, che aveva visto Napoleone a Jena e pensava di aver osservato lo spirito del tempo che si incarnava in ricognizione a cavallo. Beethoven si ricredette quando Napoleone diventò imperatore (ma forse proprio in queste vicende umane, troppo umane andava forse ricercato quel SDV che noi pensiamo di ascoltare nella sinfonia n. 3). Anche quando ascolto *Ashes to ashes* di David Bowie, provo una esperienza di pienezza di significato, ma non saprei se questa abbia a che fare con un SDV oppure con la descrizione di un fallimento esistenziale (quello dell'artista che tenta di uscire dal tunnel delle dipendenze, forse per guadagnare proprio quell'autonomia cara a Lecaldano e a gran parte della nostra tradizione della filosofia morale).

Queste esperienze intense sono esperienze di SDV, inteso come ciò che illumina l'insieme variegato delle nostre esperienze? Io ne dubito, perché sono esperienze eccezionali, che si stagliano al di sopra della banalità della maggior parte delle nostre azioni, le quali sono compiute nella meccanicità del vivere quotidiano. Non potrebbe essere che il SDV si racchiuda invece proprio in questa meccanicità irredimibile? In fin dei conti, queste azioni costituiscono numericamente la maggioranza delle cose che facciamo: ci alziamo, facciamo colazione, ci laviamo i denti, raggiungiamo il nostro posto di lavoro, pensiamo agli sgarbi che ci ha fatto un collega e a come restituirglieli, coltiviamo fantasie fuori dal nostro controllo di successo nella professione, nel sesso, in altre *performance* che le pubblicità che ci circondano ci impongono con la loro semplice esistenza di modelli onnipervasivi.

Noi fatichiamo a credere che queste esperienze racchiudano un qualche SDV. Non vogliamo crederlo e non lo crede nemmeno Lecaldano per il quale il SDV, almeno per noi occidentali delle società sempre meno affluenti, è legato all'idea di autonomia. In effetti, l'idea del soggetto focalizza per noi spesso anche l'idea dell'individuo come regolatore autonomo dei propri fini, la cui selezione è un indice molto forte della presenza di ciò che tradizionalmente chiamiamo capacità autonoma di scelta. L'esperienza comune interpreta l'individuo come quel nucleo non diviso della nostra personalità, che permane attraverso il tempo e il vortice delle nostre esperienze, ossia come il centro focale al quale noi riferiamo le esperienze che accadono, non limitandoci a dire, ad esempio, che accadono, ma avendo l'intima convinzione che accadono proprio a noi. Questa idea dell'individuo come nucleo di

⁴ E. Lecaldano, *Sul senso della vita*, cit., p. 88.

identità personale che permane attraverso il tempo non è per nulla convincente per Lecaldano, che invece (a ragione secondo me) è attratto da una visione dell'identità personale che ha uno dei suoi più efficaci cantori in David Hume.⁵ Per Hume l'identità personale non rimanda a una sostanza che permane nel tempo, ma piuttosto a una sorta di unità rappresentativa, una sorta di maschera che agisce nel teatro costituito dalle esperienze che ci troviamo a vivere. Una maschera che non possiamo forse non chiamare con un nome proprio, ma la cui personalità non rimanda certo all'identità sostanziale di una persona.

Nessuno di noi è la persona che era trenta anni fa. Molte cose sono cambiate per ciascuno di noi da allora, anche se noi continuiamo a pensare alle cose che ci sono accadute in passato come a cose che sono successe proprio a noi. Siamo un centro focale, almeno per certi aspetti di unità dell'esperienza personale nel corso del tempo (o piuttosto: nella registrazione della nostra memoria), ma non siamo affatto un'identità numerica. Lecaldano, in effetti, non ha nessuna difficoltà a simpatizzare con una visione sospettosa verso l'idea di un'identità personale stabile. Uno dei motivi per me più solidi per sostenere questo sospetto, al di là delle buone ragioni metafisiche che si possono avanzare a suo sostegno, è che l'idea di persona come sostanza individuale permanente nel tempo nasconde una forte componente narcisista, ossia la tentazione di dire continuamente 'io' per spiegare e dare un senso all'esperienza. Non ce ne è bisogno, almeno per larga parte della nostra esperienza quotidiana, nella quale siamo immersi non come persone che mettono in gioco delle opzioni nelle quali riverbera la gemma preziosa dell'autonomia, bensì come macchine biologico-sociali che vivono vite che potrebbero essere di chiunque. È questo il senso, io credo, delle analisi di Heidegger in *Essere e tempo* sul 'si', che può essere di chiunque, perché non ha alcuna importanza quale sia l'identità personale che lo compie.⁶

Forse per questo sono perplesso dall'insistenza e dalla fiducia di Lecaldano sull'autonomia del soggetto individuale. Ne sono perplesso per una serie di motivi. Il primo è che molti dei motivi che inducono un realistico scetticismo sull'idea di identità personale, potrebbero condurci verso uno scetticismo analogo sull'idea di individuo. L'idea stessa di individuo per alcuni autori è una costruzione che ha avuto una lunghissima gestazione: qualcuno la fa iniziare nella prima cristianità e nelle comunità monastiche, che sarebbero state le levatrici dell'individuo così come giungiamo a concepirlo noi, abitanti dell'Occidente liberale;⁷ qualcun altro lo colloca nella frattura operata da Hobbes tra natura e Stato.⁸ Se l'idea di individuo è una costruzione storico-culturale e non unicamente un dato biologico fattuale, allora è

⁵ E. Lecaldano, *Sul senso della vita*, cit., pp. 70-71.

⁶ M. Heidegger, *Essere e tempo* (1927), Milano, Longanesi, 1971, p. 134.

⁷ L. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual. The Origin of Western Liberalism*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014.

⁸ C. Galli, *Contingenza e necessità nella ragione politica moderna*, Bari-Roma, Laterza, 2009.

possibile che ci siano concezioni alternative che non mettono in una posizione preminente l'idea di individuo, come siamo abituati a fare noi, con una certa sospetta spontaneità. 'Individuo' significa 'non diviso', ma si può essere non divisi e non considerarsi l'entità principale dalla quale considerare il SDV. Esistono società che non assegnano affatto all'individuo quel ruolo che noi siamo abituati ad attribuirgli. Ma senza fare il solito esempio delle società orientali che privilegiano invece la comunità come sede del SDV per l'individuo (e non le sua capacità di scelta soggettiva), penserei piuttosto all'idea di Sartre del 'gruppo in fusione', come è descritto nella *Critica della ragione dialettica*.⁹ Nel gruppo in fusione Sartre vede precisamente la concretizzazione di un progetto (un progetto rivoluzionario, che a ragione per alcuni è stato e potrebbe ancora essere una manifestazione del SDV) che conferisce significato alle vite di coloro che compongono quella particolare fusione emotiva e progettuale. È proprio quella fusione a far sì che la vita di ciascuno dei componenti sia qualcosa di più della propria vita individuale. Facile immaginare che questa sia una fonte di possibili abusi, è chiaro, così come è chiaro che sarebbe ragionare dal punto di vista individualistico sollevare questa obiezione, il che è proprio il punto di vista che viene criticato.

Questa preminenza accordata all'individuo sembra poter essere per Lecaldano anche la ragione principale per rigettare il legame tra SDV e immortalità. Penso che qui si aprono parecchi problemi che non rendono, per quanto mi riguarda, convincente la negazione del legame tra SDV e immortalità. È ovvio che questo legame non è analitico, ovvero non è necessario che ci sia l'immortalità affinché ci sia un qualche SDV per l'individuo, ma non è nemmeno da escludere che un qualche SDV dall'immortalità possa emergere. Bernard Williams ne ha parlato in un articolo divenuto celebre, *Il caso Macropulos: riflessioni sul tedio dell'immortalità*.¹⁰ Nel saggio si analizza una delle conclusioni teoriche di una commedia di Karel Čapek, basata sulla storia di una donna, Elina Macropulos, apparentemente immortale, in seguito all'assunzione di un farmaco sperimentato su di lei dal padre. Nel momento in cui il dramma si svolge Elina ha più di trecento anni e nulla più da sperimentare dal punto di vista esistenziale. Tutto le appare freddo e incapace di generare in lei una qualche forma di partecipazione emotiva.

L'idea, coltivata da Bernard Williams e da altri, è che l'immortalità produce noia e tedio infinito e perciò annullerebbe ogni altra prospettiva di ricerca di un SDV, il quale, se ne conclude, ha senso soprattutto all'interno della nostra condizione mortale. Questa prospettiva che Lecaldano, assieme a Williams e altri, condivide con alcune filosofie esistenzialistiche, a me pare forzata. Io credo che tutto dipende dalla qualità dell'immortalità che si potrebbe vivere. Se per immortalità intendiamo aver vissuto un tempo infinito, se ne potrebbe dedurre che l'individuo che ha già vissuto

⁹ J.-P. Sartre, *Critica della ragione dialettica* (1960), Milano, Il Saggiatore, 1990.

¹⁰ B. Williams, *Il caso Macropulos: riflessioni sul tedio dell'immortalità*, in B. Williams, *Problemi dell'io* (1973), Milano, Il Saggiatore, 1990, pp. 101-124.

un tempo infinito, dotato di una memoria infinita e di una esperienza che esaurisce qualsiasi esperienza sperimentabile, potrebbe effettivamente essere colto da noia irrimediabile, che inibirebbe qualsiasi ricerca e percezione di un SDV (anche se forse si può immaginare qualche controesempio che smentisce questa conclusione). Ma se per immortalità si intende una esistenza infinita a partire da un qualche momento, allora io credo che la noia sia un'opzione che potrebbe anche non comparire. Innanzitutto, molto dipende anche dalle condizioni nelle quali l'immortalità viene vissuta. È chiaro che stiamo parlando dell'immortalità di un individuo che è in grado di fare un ventaglio ampio di esperienze, ovvero non contempliamo l'immortalità di vivere per sempre confinati in un polmone d'acciaio. Questa non sarebbe una vita augurabile per nessuno, ma significherebbe vivere immersi in una condizione peggiore del supplizio di Sisifo. Se, tuttavia, io potessi godere dell'immortalità nel corpo che abitavo quando avevo venticinque anni, la cosa non mi sembrerebbe così incline alla produzione di noia. Potrei godere delle cose della vita sia fisicamente sia, acquisita una esperienza vasta, intellettualmente con una profondità tale da unire il sapore della giovinezza con l'esperienza della maturità. Ad un certo punto sopraggiungerebbe la noia? È lecito immaginarselo, ma allora è lecito anche immaginarsi il momento in cui la tecnologia potrebbe essere sufficientemente avanzata da produrre assieme a una costante inibizione della ricaptazione della serotonina anche una capacità selettiva del proprio deposito mnemonico. Potremmo anche immaginarci una vita immortale con un meccanismo simile a quello della medusa *turritopsis nutricula*, che raggiunta la maturità regredisce alla giovinezza e poi all'immaturità sessuale, una specie di continua reiterazione de *Il curioso caso di Benjam Button* del racconto di F.S. Fitzgerald.

È stato Nietzsche a notare nella seconda considerazione inattuale, *Sull'utilità e il danno della storia per la vita*,¹¹ che un eccesso di memoria inibisce l'azione. Quello che lui aveva in mente era l'eccesso degli studi storici, ma possiamo facilmente estendere la sua considerazione alla memoria individuale. Anche l'individuo potrebbe essere bloccato dall'eccesso di esperienza depositato nella sua memoria a lungo termine, una volta che avesse vissuto un periodo di tempo sufficientemente lungo. Che cosa voglia dire sufficientemente lungo non siamo in grado attualmente di precisarlo: forse mille anni è una buona cifra di partenza. Immagina, allora, di avere mille anni e di avere l'aspetto fisico e la salute di una persona di 25 anni. Immagina anche di riuscire a resettare periodicamente la tua memoria, magari attraverso l'assunzione di un qualche farmaco, che elimina i ricordi delle esperienze sgradevoli, che ti è capitato di fare, e magari anche il tedio della ripetizione di quanto, sperimentato la prima volta, era invece gratificante. Per quale motivo non dovresti desiderare di ripetere esperienze gradevoli che hai già vissuto? Naturalmente, è ovvio che la prima volta che esci a cena con Adriana Lima vivi

¹¹ F. Nietzsche, *Sull'utilità e il danno della storia per la vita* (1874), Milano, Adelphi, 1974.

un'esperienza di grande gratificazione, almeno per la maggior parte dei maschi etero, che non potrà essere la stessa che vivrai quando ci uscirai la ventesima volta, se mai ti capiterà questa esperienza, che può essere solo un patrimonio di pochi (come tutte le esperienze che hanno a che fare con i qualia personali, però: anche questo è qualcosa che ci accomuna nella ricerca del SDV). Magari, però, potresti cancellare la memoria delle tue ultime uscite che sono state o noiose (la conversazione sembrava languire, le tue preoccupazioni o le sue sembravano aver preso il sopravvento) oppure insoddisfacenti (la fila al ristorante era eccessiva, ammesso Adriana Lima debba mai fare una fila, l'hamburger vegano era cotto male). Potresti, con l'ausilio di una memoria selettiva, riguadagnare una freschezza e una disponibilità all'esperienza che sarebbe un valido ausilio al patrimonio ancora ricco dei tuoi ormoni. L'idea che l'immortalità regali necessariamente la noia, idea che nutrono molti intellettuali, a me sembra una *exusatio non petita* per chi tutto sommato non si rassegna non tanto ad essere mortale (forse anche essere un immortale potrebbe contemplare delle condizioni di mortalità, ad esempio morire sgozzato o investito da un camion) quanto ad invecchiare. La vecchiaia potrebbe in alcuni casi portare saggezza, ma l'approssimarsi alla fine della propria esistenza non è che me la renda più desiderabile. Il decadimento fisico non contribuisce a rendere la vita più interessante, ma via via più penosa. Questo sentimento io credo poi sia accresciuto dal fatto che le nostre facoltà intellettuali ci permettono a lungo un godimento intenso o anche soltanto accettabile che non decresce in proporzione al nostro decadimento fisico. La nostra mente è ancora pronta e il nostro fisico non risponde più. Guardi il corpo che da giovane ti attraeva, ne trai ancora un piacere estetico, ma la tua attrazione non si trasforma in eccitazione. Sei un grande musicista, ma il tuo fisico non ti permette di fare le *performance* che ti hanno reso uno dei più grandi artisti pop del pianeta (come è accaduto a Phil Collins).

Invecchiare penosamente e riluttanti è la nostra condizione attuale, dalla quale derivava tutta la retorica della vecchiaia latrice di saggezza, una forma di ipocrisia, ritengo, che ora nemmeno ha più tanto corso (per ragioni che hanno a che fare con il capitalismo di consumo, secondo me). Questa è la nostra condizione dunque, ma le cose potrebbero cambiare. Inoltre, a me non pare che le persone usualmente pensino che vivere da immortali potrebbe essere una sventura. Altrimenti, non si capirebbe, ad esempio, l'attrazione che la figura letteraria e cinematografica del vampiro esercita su moltitudini di persone. Una certa rappresentazione del vampiro epitomizza il nostro desiderio di corpi tonici, pelli lisce, sensi acuti, intelletto sempre pronto. In mancanza di questo, ci precipitiamo in palestra a fare dell'esercizio fisico il succedaneo di un'immortalità che non c'è e che pensiamo di sostituire combattendo il nostro inevitabile decadimento. Qualora, poi, il progresso tecnico in un futuro imprecisato, ma che potrebbe essere più vicino di quanto ci immaginiamo, ci consentisse di interagire con le macchine al livello della nostra biologia costitutiva, potremmo mai pensare che questo non abbia un qualche impatto sulla ricerca del

SDV per una persona che potrebbe cominciare seriamente a pensarsi immortale? L'immortalità né è ostativa al SDV inteso come esperienza complessiva di senso e gratificazione, anche non edonistica, né è legata a prospettive religiose.

Naturalmente, uno dei problemi centrali dell'immortalità è, come accennavo, che cosa viene conservato di quanto eravamo nel nostro essere immortali. È, in parte, un problema ulteriore rispetto a quello del SDV, ma potrebbe indicare che, come non dobbiamo essere più legati a una soluzione forte dell'identità personale per la nostra ricerca del SDV, allo stesso modo non dobbiamo essere vincolati alla fine della vita per immaginarcelo. Potrebbe in fin dei conti essere che qualcuno di noi giunga alla conclusione che il SDV per lui è una serie di esperienze infinite. Anche qui, in presenza di un'esperienza infinita, forse la noia sorgerebbe solo in un eterno ritorno del quale noi conservassimo memoria. Un pensiero non meno vertiginoso, almeno per me, di quello della ricerca del SDV.

Ma non è questa l'ultima vertigine che mi capita di sperimentare, interrogandomi sul SDV. Proprio adesso ho utilizzato un programma che crea un *cloud* delle parole che ho maggiormente adoperato su un social negli ultimi mesi. Due mi impressionano, perché tengo a legarle tra di loro a proposito del SDV: endoxa e immortalità. Le endoxa sono le opinioni ricevute che costituiscono la trama, ancora irriflessa, ma necessaria, della nostra esperienza morale.¹² Le endoxa sul SDV sono naturalmente numerose sia perché viviamo nell'epoca del politeismo dei valori sia perché siamo convinti di vivere nell'epoca delle diversificazione delle esperienze individuali. L'idea stessa del marketing individuale sembra riconoscere precisamente questo: che le esperienze che fai sono proprio tue e di nessun altro e, quindi, anche le merci che ti vengono proposte devono rispecchiare questa unicità, avviandoci verso il limite ideale della merce tarata solo per te stesso e di un'esperienza del consumo che deve essere intimamente personale. Almeno questa la promessa. Tuttavia, anche adesso la nostra esperienza del SDV – della sua ricerca, della sua localizzazione spaziale o collocazione temporale – è del tutto incerta, e molti sensi del SDV, forse, per noi si accavallano durante la nostra esistenza. Allora, mentre è plausibile ritenere che quanto suggerisce Lecaldano sia vero, ossia che in un qualche modo noi non possiamo fare a meno di porci la domanda sul SDV, dobbiamo giungere alla conclusione che il trascendentale più adeguato a questa stessa domanda sarebbe non porsela troppo spesso? Oppure potrebbe essere porsela uscendo dalla prospettiva del soggetto, dell'individuo, della persona, dell'autonomia? È questa ultima la strada che mi sento di suggerire.

La vertigine che almeno a me suscitano tutte queste domande, lascia spesso il posto a un imbarazzo, perché io ovviamente non ho risposte da dare per quanto riguarda me stesso (proprio la persona che sono in questo momento) all'interrogativo sul SDV, ma penso, viceversa, che una risposta che riguarda molti di noi,

¹² Aristotele, *Etica Nicomachea*, Bari-Roma, Laterza, 1999, libro VII.

tendenzialmente tutti noi, possa essere tracciata. Non è, ovviamente, l'unica disponibile, ma a me sembra decisamente importante. Solo che l'operazione da fare è, immagino, una di quelle che Lecaldano non sarebbe forse disposto a sottoscrivere. Io penso, infatti, che un qualche SDV possa in definitiva darsi (al di là della nostra vicenda evolutiva, intendo, se non vogliamo limitarci a dire che il SDV è la nostra esemplificazione come istanze della fitness evolutiva, la quale, ammettiamolo, potrebbe essere una buona risposta transindividuale), ma prima dobbiamo pensare che questo non riguardi le persone come individui, bensì la considerazione delle persone sotto una diversa prospettiva.

Questa prospettiva non è l'individuazione religiosa di un qualche SDV, bensì è una prospettiva materiale. Questa materialità, con il suo carico di esperienza e di contingenza, di storicità e di inevitabilità (una volta che ha preso possesso delle nostre vite), in un certo senso, è accanto a noi e ci accompagna in qualsiasi cosa facciamo: nelle esperienze consapevoli che abbiamo, ma anche nelle emozioni che crediamo di voler desiderare, noi, proprio noi come individui. È un SDV che forse non emerge, se non occasionalmente, alla consapevolezza e trascende l'individuo e la vita che desidera fare e i progetti che formula e dei quali desidera il compimento. È anche un SDV che coinvolge gran parte del genere umano, anche se forse non si estende sempre a tutti, sebbene le sue ambizioni siano proprio queste. Mi riferisco al fatto che una parte notevole delle vite di ciascuno di noi ha significato in quanto consumatori di merci e in quanto merce noi stessi. È principalmente questo valore (il valore di una merce) a essere il SDV di noi, abitanti delle società affluenti. In questo valore, essere noi compratori di merci ed essere noi stessi delle merci, noi possiamo anche non riconoscerci e dire che non rappresenta le nostre aspirazioni più profonde o, addirittura, dire che entra in contrasto con quello che noi abbiamo individuato come il nostro SDV (se mai ne siamo capaci), ma questa *nostra* ambizione confligge con la natura colonizzatrice della merce, ossia con l'ambizione *della merce* di essere qualsiasi cosa, figlia del tutto coerente del capitalismo, che appunto qualsiasi cosa può essere (liberismo, mercantilismo, protezionismo, monetarismo, democrazia, liberalismo, dittatura di destra o di sinistra, Beethoven e Renato Zero, Leonardo da Vinci e Damien Hirst, Giacomo Leopardi e Fabio Volo, possesso di un bene durevole e acquisto di un'emozione evanescente, essendo l'unica cosa rilevante che le merci vengano vendute). Il valore della merce però non è più quello che pensava Marx, ossia il lavoro umano medio che vi viene incorporato. In un'epoca di automazione crescente e di crescente perdita dei posti di lavoro, questa nozione deve essere soppiantata da una considerazione diversa del valore della merce. La nostra vita individuale ha palesemente un significato per moltissimi altri, che sono interessati a venderci le loro merci sia materiali sia immateriali. La finzione individualistica (che nella forma dell'identità sostanziale del sé personale, Lecaldano sembra disposto ad abbandonare), mentre è del tutto coerente con l'idea della sovranità del consumatore, non può certo resistere a un minimo di analisi critica. Davvero, mentre siamo

disposti a concedere che la maggior parte delle cose che facciamo non siano realmente decise da noi, e facciamo bensì parte di un'attitudine meccanica a vivere la vita con i suoi rituali quotidiani, non vogliamo invece ammettere che come consumatori non siamo affatto dei decisori autonomi, bensì delle persone che indossano la maschera del consumatore per vivere la vita di qualcun altro? L'ideologia del pauperismo mi è del tutto estranea e la ritengo piuttosto reazionaria, ma penso che a molti di noi sia spesso venuto in mente che potremmo vivere riducendo drasticamente le merci che acquistiamo e che spesso non abbiamo nemmeno il tempo di consumare. E se l'unico atto realmente rivoluzionario è non consumare, come sostiene qualcuno, allora questo significa che il SDV di noi per qualcun altro, dentro il capitalismo, è proprio la nostra esistenza come consumatori. A nostra volta ognuno di noi è anche una merce, ad esempio nei dati che produce con la sua semplice esistenza di soggetto connesso ad altri soggetti, dati che verranno venduti a qualcuno per produrre altre merci (sondaggi attendibili, previsioni di scenari economici e così via).

Guardare al SDV come a un problema introspettivo che nasce dentro il soggetto individuale e nel soggetto individuale si esaurisce, è una prospettiva nobile, forse indispensabile a ciascuno di noi in una qualche fase della propria vita, ma a me sembra inadeguata, senza l'idea che il SDV si potrebbe realizzare a nostra insaputa proprio in quel destino secolare che il capitalismo è, e che null'altro è che l'ambizione di costruire il trascendentale di ogni esperienza, la colonizzazione asintotica delle nostre esistenze, dove tutto, proprio tutto, può divenire merce: non solo il nostro lavoro (termine che diviene esso stesso antiquato, come se il tempo trascorso sui social non fosse esso stesso un lavoro, sebbene non pagato), ma anche tutto il nostro tempo libero (ammesso che questo esista al di fuori della determinazione della merce, cosa che io non credo). Questo SDV esiste quindi nella nostra contingenza storica, ma ha anche ambizioni di universalità (e questo era uno dei tratti distintivi della ricerca del SDV, quando poteva essere legato a un credo religioso), poiché sarebbe un errore ritenere che il capitalismo sia solo un sistema economico e non anche un destino, quello appunto di ridurre tutto a merce. Ricercare il SDV nella nostra interiorità, farne una ricerca personale, individuale, al limite nemmeno ben comunicabile ad altri, può indurre delle risposte, ma queste io credo siano risposte poco persuasive rispetto a un SDV che noi non decidiamo. Abbandonato il mito del soggetto sostanziale, io credo che dobbiamo anche abbandonare il mito dell'individuo e dell'autonomia, che quella ricerca del SDV personale sorregge, e cercalo, appunto, altrove.

SENSO DELLA VITA E MORALITÀ: LE RELAZIONI PERICOLOSE

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I offer some critical reflections on E. Lecaldano, *Il senso della vita* (Bologna, Il Mulino, 2016). I focus on the relationships between the meaning of life and morality. My main claim will be that only two options are logically consistent – either the meaning of life and morality are quite independent or morality determines and restraints which lives could have meaning. However, both of those options are implausible. Lecaldano pursues an intermediate position – to the effect that seriously immoral lives could not have meaning. But this view faces difficulties.

KEYWORDS

E. Lecaldano, morality, meaning of life, practical reason, Kant, Butler.

1. INTRODUZIONE

Con questo volume Eugenio Lecaldano affronta un argomento sino a poco tempo fa trascurato, almeno nella filosofia accademica di impronta analitica¹. La cosa ha del paradossale. Thaddeus Metz, che al tema ha dedicato di recente la monografia più sistematica in lingua inglese, nella sua prima lezione come professore all'University of the Witwatersrand, in Sudafrica, esordì dicendo che “il senso della vita è l'argomento di cui i non filosofi pensano che i filosofi si occupino e di cui i filosofi pensano di non dovere occuparsi”². Questa lacuna può derivare da

1 Cfr. (Lecaldano 2016). D'ora in poi, i riferimenti alle pagine di questo libro compariranno nel testo fra parentesi.

2 Cfr. (Metz 2014). Ringrazio Michele Bocchiola per avermi riportato la frase di Metz. Tra i testi più rilevanti della letteratura più recente sul senso della vita, limitandosi agli studiosi di lingua inglese, si possono vedere: (Adams 2002; Audi 2005; Baggini 2007; Baier 1997; Belliotti 2001; Belshaw 2005; Benatar et al. 2010; Bennett 1984; Cottingham 2003; Eagleton 2007; Ellin 1995; Ford 2007; Frankfurt 1988; Hanfling 1991; Kekes 2000; Klemke e Cahn 2000; Margolis 1990; Martin 2002; Moorhead 1988; Murphy 1982; Singer 1994; Solomon 1993; Taylor 2000; Wolf et al. 2010),

due cause: l'eredità di un pregiudizio neopositivista, secondo cui le affermazioni sul senso della vita, come quelle sull'etica, non si possono verificare con procedure oggettive (come per esempio l'uso dei sensi) e dunque non possono essere oggetto di analisi filosofica, e la tendenza crescente alla specializzazione nell'ambito della filosofia accademica, che rende spesso poco produttivo, anche e soprattutto per le carriere, dedicarsi a temi così ampi³.

Lecaldano ha il merito di esplorare la questione senza rinunciare al rigore tipico della filosofia accademica, e ha la rara capacità di usare la strumentazione filosofica per illuminare elementi centrali della condizione umana: la trattazione è serrata ma anche ricchissima di aperture alla vita quotidiana, alla letteratura e alla storia.

In quel che segue mi concentrerò su un argomento particolare – le relazioni fra senso della vita e moralità⁴. Nel § 2 sintetizzo la teoria di Lecaldano e metto in luce gli aspetti specifici che m'interessano. Nel § 3 presento alcune obiezioni specifiche, nel § 4 traggio delle conseguenze generali delle mie obiezioni per la teoria sentimentalista del senso della vita che Lecaldano difende.

2. SENSO DELLA VITA, MORALITÀ E PRUDENZA: SFERE DI VALORE DISTINTE

Per Lecaldano il senso della vita si deve distinguere da due altri orizzonti di valore: la moralità e la prudenza. Nello specifico Lecaldano sostiene che il senso della vita sia distinto, per quanto non del tutto indipendente, rispetto alla moralità, mentre esso è del tutto indipendente dalla prudenza, cioè dalla ricerca della felicità e del benessere personali⁵.

Per Lecaldano, la moralità ha “un indubbio valore regolativo” anche nei confronti della dimensione del senso della vita: “[...] la salvaguardia dei valori morali è una condizione necessaria ma niente affatto sufficiente per condurre una vita che sia dotata di senso” (49). La prova di questa relazione fra moralità e senso della vita starebbe nel confronto fra due tipi di vite, esemplificate dal pittore Paul Gauguin e da Hitler, o dagli altri gerarchi nazisti, o anche dai kamikaze terroristi

3 Sul neopositivismo, si veda (Metz 2014, 21–2). Anche Lecaldano critica le impostazioni secondo cui la questione del senso della vita non avrebbe senso (23-6, 42 n. 11).

4 Ma dello stesso tema si occupano anche i contributi di C. Botti e S. Bacin in questo stesso numero di *Etica & Politica / Ethics & Politics*.

5 Per Lecaldano, la questione del *senso della vita individuale o biografica* si distingue anche da quella del *senso ultimo o cosmico della vita umana in generale o della vita in sé e per sé* (22, 96). Qui non mi occuperò di questa distinzione.

fondamentalisti. Nella vita di Gauguin, sostiene Lecaldano, “la grandezza del valore creato [...] con la sua attività artistica” è maggiore “del disvalore morale che si può attribuire alle sua condotta nei confronti di moglie, figlio e lavoro”⁶. Tuttavia, ci sono vite in cui il disvalore morale è talmente alto da annullarne la sensatezza, afferma Lecaldano:

pur riconoscendo che tra i vari beni con cui abbiamo a che fare nel corso della vita quello morale non necessariamente debba prevalere su altri che hanno a che fare con la significatività dell'esistenza [...], non possiamo spingerci fino al punto di giustificare e riconoscere come significativa una condotta che metta completamente da parte le esigenze dell'etica. Si pensi alle biografie dei criminali nazisti o delle grandi personalità malvagie della storia: proprio perché costruite intorno ad azioni malefiche, ad esse non accettiamo di attribuire alcun senso. [...] In certi casi, la condotta della persona suscita una tale condanna morale che non è possibile riconoscere alcun senso in quella vita, anche se ha realizzato qualcosa. [...] Anche un tentativo di immedesimarci immaginativamente nella loro prospettiva interna e soggettiva ci porterebbe a concludere che solo una profonda patologia psicologica ha permesso a questi individui di trovare un senso in comportamenti crudeli e violenti. Nessuna immaginazione simpatetica riesce a trovare un senso in vite che causano morte e distruzione: non si può certo attribuire un senso alla vita del kamikaze che si uccide causando una strage, e chi giunge a conclusioni diverse, non solo è ottenebrato dal fanatismo, ma è confuso sui concetti che sono coinvolti. Non c'è alcun valore nell'immolarsi per la propria fede ammazzando violentemente decine di persone innocenti e inermi: le personalità che credono di potere dare senso alla propria vita in questo modo sono affette da specifici disturbi psicologici e conducono un'esistenza all'interno della quale non è rintracciabile alcuna ricerca sul senso della vita (56-8).

Per Lecaldano, dunque, ci sono casi in cui i valori che danno sensatezza alla vita possono prevalere sui valori, o meglio sui disvalori, morali – e questo è il caso della vita di Gauguin. Queste vite sono sensate, anche se lievemente immorali. In altri casi, invece, i disvalori morali presenti in certe vite silenziano l'eventuale senso che queste vite potrebbero avere: queste vite sono assolutamente immorali e anche insensate⁷.

A favore di questa tesi, nel passo citato sopra Lecaldano presenta due argomentazioni: in primo luogo, le reazioni di condanna che ci suscitano certe condotte ci impediscono di considerare sensate le vite che tali condotte ospitano (*argomentazione della condanna morale*); in secondo luogo, queste vite non sono

6 L'esempio della vita di Gauguin compare per la prima volta in (Williams 1987c, 33–57). Si veda anche (Nagel 1988a, 34 n. 3).

7 Il senso del termine 'silenziare' che impiego qui è ispirato all'uso che ne fa (McDowell 1998, 55–6).

comprensibili, o non lo sono in quanto sensate, al pari di vite affette da disturbi psicologici (*argomentazione della psicopatia*)⁸.

Nel caso della prudenza, la tesi di Lecaldano è che il senso della vita sia del tutto indipendente, e non solo distinto, dalla ricerca della felicità o del benessere:

Il piano sul quale agiamo per dare un senso alla nostra vita va tenuto distinto da quello sul quale ci diamo da fare per ottenere una vita felice – ammesso che ciò sia possibile – o per realizzare il nostro benessere. Diversamente da ciò che accade con la moralità, non si tratta solo di una distinzione, bensì di una vera e propria indipendenza: non c'è nessuna contraddizione nel sostenere che una persona abbia condotto una vita pienamente sensata e insieme profondamente infelice. Possiamo trovare un senso della nostra vita anche se essa è triste e piena di sofferenze. L'orizzonte della ricerca di una vita sensata impone di dare rilevanza a un criterio interpersonale che invece non è riconoscibile nell'ambito della ricerca di una vita felice (58-9).

Su questa visione della natura della questione del senso della vita Lecaldano costruisce la sua concezione sentimentalista e individualista: “la ricerca di senso si può sviluppare”, sostiene Lecaldano, “solo muovendo da quelle che sono le nostre reali emozioni e passioni”, al centro di una vita sensata ci sono “i desideri e i sentimenti individuali [...] che costituiscono il carattere di ogni essere umano” (29, 65) e “solo il riconoscimento completo della nostra soggettività e della nostra autonomia può permetterci di dare un senso alla nostra vita” (33). Per Lecaldano, il senso della vita è il significato che un soggetto specifico trova nella sua vita,

8 Lecaldano sembra non essere certo, tuttavia, della validità generale di questa teoria, giacché ammette che certe vite immorali potrebbero, alla fin fine, avere senso: “Ma non si può generalizzare: anche la vita delle persone affette da disturbi psichiatrici può avere senso. I romanzi di Dostoevskij affrontano questo tema, attribuendo però difficoltà e fallimenti non a disturbi più o meno gravi della personalità, quanto piuttosto alla perdita della fede in Dio. In un contesto più moderno e secolarizzato, lo stesso tipo di problematica viene affrontato anche da Woody Allen in alcuni dei suoi film: in *Pallottole su Broadway*, ad esempio, egli sembra giustificare un gangster che ammazza la moglie del boss che si ritiene una capace scrittrice di commedie; paradossalmente e beffardamente, si scopre poi che questo stesso gangster è autore di capolavori drammatici. In *Irrational Man*, invece, Allen ridicolizza il personaggio di un professore di filosofia che supera la sua depressione nichilistica dedicandosi all'obiettivo di eliminare un giudice ingiusto: crimine che il professore pagherà con una serie di scelte obbligate a esso conseguenti che alla fine lo porteranno alla morte” (58). Qui non mi occuperò di questa oscillazione: assumerò che per Lecaldano certe vite siano talmente immorali che qualsiasi sensatezza in esse viene persa, o, altrimenti detto, che ci siano mali morali che non possono venire compensati da alcuna dimensione di sensatezza.

costruendo la propria vicenda biografica, dandole unità e coerenza grazie alla sua vita sentimentale (74).

Infine, per Lecaldano il senso della vita non deriva dal seguire desideri e sentimenti transitori e inautentici, ma dal secondare “passioni ed emozioni che hanno una continuità e si accordano con il carattere che ci è proprio” (80), e dal “permanere di capacità affettive e relazionali” (112). Processi di riflessione e generalizzazione simili a quelli che, nelle metaetiche sentimentaliste ed espressiviste, costituiscono il punto di vista morale a partire da un immaginario spettatore imparziale e bene informato rendono conto dell'idea che ciò che dà senso alla nostra vita possa anche essere compreso dagli altri come sensato e dotato di valore (131-3).

3. DISTINZIONE SENZA INDIPENDENZA? GAUGUIN, PERLASCA E HITLER

Per Lecaldano, come si è visto, senso della vita e moralità sono sfere distinte, ma non del tutto indipendenti. Anche se per certuni la moralità può dare senso alla vita, così non è per altri, come è provato ad esempio dalla depressione giovanile di J.S. Mill, il quale si rese conto che l'adesione al progetto riformistico utilitarista portato avanti da suo padre James e da Jeremy Bentham non dava senso alla sua vita – Lecaldano discute a lungo queste vicende biografiche di Mill (115-7)⁹. Possono esistere caratteri per così dire filantropici – che trovano nell'orizzonte della moralità il senso della propria vita. Tali sono il filosofo utilitarista Peter Singer, ad esempio, e i molti che si impegnano in progetti filantropici seguendo il suo esempio¹⁰. Ma questa non è che una delle possibili strade per dare senso alla propria vita, e non è una strada necessaria, sostiene Lecaldano. Vite come quelle di Paul Gauguin hanno un senso che non si manifesta nella dimensione della moralità: anzi, esse sono lievemente immorali. Tuttavia, vite fortemente immorali, come quelle di Hitler e dei gerarchi nazisti, non possono essere sensate.

Nei confronti di questa visione muoverò tre obiezioni. In primo luogo, contesterò la possibilità stessa di distinguere fra moralità e senso della vita – o

9 Sulla depressione giovanile di Mill, e sul suo significato per la filosofia milliana, riflettono molti interpreti – si vedano i riferimenti dello stesso Lecaldano (134 n. 7, 136 nn. 21-22). Un'analisi molto esaustiva di queste vicende biografiche di Mill in relazione al tema del senso della vita è in (Kekes 1986).

10 Cfr. (Singer 2015; MacAskill 2015; Gabriel 2016; McMahan 2016; Carey 2015). Ho discusso l'altruismo efficace di P. Singer in (Pellegrino 2017).

almeno di farlo da un punto di vista personale o interno, che, si ricordi, è quello che si deve assumere nella concezione di Lecaldano per giudicare del senso della vita. In secondo luogo, sosterrò che, pure se fosse possibile, una distinzione senza indipendenza fra senso della vita e moralità sarebbe concettualmente instabile. In terzo luogo, mostrerò che certe ragioni per una distinzione senza indipendenza fra moralità e senso della vita in realtà sono a favore di una indipendenza assoluta fra le due sfere. La mia conclusione quindi sarà la seguente: o non c'è distinzione alcuna fra moralità e senso della vita, o, se una distinzione si pone, allora c'è indipendenza assoluta fra le due sfere. Entrambe le opzioni, tuttavia, sono problematiche: se si afferma che non c'è distinzione, si corre il rischio di abbracciare una visione moralista; se si ritiene che ci sia indipendenza assoluta, si dovrà accettare la sensatezza di vite immorali, il che molti di noi non vorrebbero fare. Di conseguenza, un ulteriore lavoro di riflessione è necessario, per trovare una visione più adeguata delle relazioni fra moralità e senso della vita.

3.1. Contro la distinzione fra differenti sfere di valore e specie di ragioni

La distinzione che Lecaldano pone fra moralità e senso della vita separa concettualmente orizzonti di valore e ragioni per l'azione o moventi di specie diversa. Questa visione compare anche nel seguente passo di S. Wolf:

I modelli filosofici della psicologia umana – o, più nello specifico, della motivazione umana – tendono a ricadere nell'una o l'altra di due categorie. Il modello forse più antico e popolare concepisce gli esseri umani come egoisti, mossi e guidati esclusivamente da ciò che per loro è nel proprio interesse. Ma ci sono stati da lungo tempo anche difensori di un modello dualistico della motivazione, secondo cui le persone possono venire mosse non solo dal proprio interesse, ma anche da qualcosa di 'più elevato'. È noto, ad esempio, che Kant pensava che oltre a essere soggetti alle inclinazioni, gli esseri umani sono capaci di venire mossi e diretti dalla sola ragione.

Strettamente connessi a questi due modelli descrittivi della motivazione umana ci sono modelli prescrittivi o normativi della ragion pratica. La tesi descrittiva dell'egoismo psicologico, secondo cui le persone cercano solo il proprio bene, si connette strettamente alla tesi normativa dell'egoismo razionale (di frequente viene confusa con essa), cioè la tesi secondo cui gli individui sono razionali solo quando si pongono l'obiettivo di massimizzare il proprio benessere. In corrispondenza alla concezione dualistica della motivazione umana troviamo pure una concezione dualistica della ragion pratica. Forse la versione più esplicita di essa compare negli scritti di Henry Sidgwick, il quale sosteneva che

due prospettive forniscono ragioni egualmente valide per agire: la prospettiva egoistica, che detta di perseguire ciò che è più nell'interesse dell'agente, e quella impersonale, che spinge a compiere ciò che è meglio “dal punto di vista dell'universo”.

[...] Questi modelli di motivazione e ragion pratica, tuttavia, a mio parere lasciano fuori dal quadro molti dei moventi e delle ragioni che danno forma alle nostre vite. Per di più, queste ragioni non sono né periferiche né eccentriche. Anzi, potremmo dire che si tratta delle ragioni più importanti e centrali nelle nostre vite. Sono ragioni e moventi che ci conducono a impegnarci nelle attività che rendono le nostre vite degne di essere vissute: ci danno ragione per andare avanti, e fanno girare il nostro mondo. Queste ragioni, e le attività che esse stimolano, danno senso alle nostre vite¹¹.

Lecaldano sembra assumere la prospettiva di Wolf, secondo cui il senso della vita è la fonte di un terzo tipo di ragioni per agire, o di valori da promuovere o onorare¹². Le argomentazioni che egli impiega a favore della distinzione fra senso della vita e moralità fanno leva su una concezione di moralità come orizzonte impersonale e universalistico – contrapponendo il pluralismo dei molti progetti di vita che possono essere egualmente sensati all'universalismo della moralità e riprendendo il dualismo di T. Nagel fra punto di vista personale e punto di vista impersonale (50, 68, 72)¹³.

Ma a questa concezione triadica della motivazione e dell'agire morale si possono porre due obiezioni: in primo luogo, essa è in sé e per sé poco plausibile; in secondo luogo, essa non si concilia con la concezione sentimentalistica e soggettivistica del senso della vita difesa da Lecaldano.

La concezione triadica implica una tesi classificatoria, secondo cui le ragioni che spingono le persone ad agire si possono ricondurre a sfere di tipo diverso (alcune ragioni appartengono alla moralità, altre alla prudenza, altre ancora al senso della vita). La mia obiezione a questa tesi classificatoria è che essa vale in terza persona, forse, ma non in prima persona. Chi aiuta una persona sofferente, e poi si abbandona al piacere di una gita in barca, e dedica la sua vita alla pittura, non pensa di agire per tre tipi di ragione differenti – ma per tre ragioni diverse. Chi si dedica alla pittura non pensa di poterlo fare perché non è moralmente proibito, né

11 (Wolf et al. 2010, 1–2).

12 Nel suo libro, Lecaldano non usa l'espressione 'ragioni per agire', ma preferisce parlare di 'valori'. Qui uso il termine 'ragioni' perché Wolf ne fa impiego, e perché esso è comune nella discussione sul senso della vita che da Wolf prende le mosse. Non intendo assumere nessuna interpretazione particolarmente razionalistica: le ragioni cui faccio riferimento si possono intendere come ragioni interne, nel senso impiegato in (Williams 1987b), e come moventi sentimentali o passionali.

13 Cfr. (Nagel 1988b).

pensa di poterlo fare anche se è moralmente proibito – tutt'al più, pensa di poterlo fare perché facendolo non lede nessuno, o di poterlo fare anche se facendolo danneggia qualcuno. Il contrasto eventuale non è fra senso della vita e moralità, ma fra specifiche ragioni – una ragione per dedicarsi alla pittura, una ragione per non farlo, giacché facendolo altri soffrirebbero...

Come scriveva Joseph Butler, argomentando contro l'egoismo psicologico e contro l'egoismo come teoria della razionalità pratica, bisogna distinguere fra l'oggetto specifico delle passioni che ci motivano ad agire e principi generali come l'amor di sé: le nostre passioni non hanno come proprio oggetto la promozione del benessere come fine generale, bensì singoli e specifici piaceri o oggetti di desiderio. Generalizzando la tesi di Butler, e formulandola con un linguaggio diverso, l'idea è che desideri e ragioni per agire derivano da fatti, sentimenti o oggetti specifici – il piacere di una gita in barca, il sentimento di compassione per chi soffre, il coinvolgimento derivante dal terminare un quadro –, non da principi o orizzonti di valore generali, come il giusto o il bello, o la sensatezza della vita¹⁴.

Può anche darsi che la moralità costituisca una sfera indipendente – nel senso che le ragioni morali siano da classificare come distinte rispetto alle ragioni prudenziali, o alle ragioni per compiere azioni che danno senso alla nostra vita. Ma non è detto che, soprattutto in prima persona, l'articolazione di queste sfere sia percepita come elemento pratico, cioè come caratteristica di ciò che ci spinge ad

14 Cfr.(Selby-Bigge 1897, 228). Il contenuto esatto delle argomentazioni di Butler, tuttavia, non è semplice da stabilire con esattezza: si vedano (Henson 1988; Penelhum 1986). Nella sua spiegazione della virtù artificiale della giustizia, Hume sostiene che “il semplice rispetto per la virtù di un'azione” non può mai “costituire il primo motivo che produce l'azione”: “prendiamo un uomo che compie numerose azioni caritatevoli”, continua Hume, “conforta gli afflitti ed estende la sua bontà anche a coloro che gli sono totalmente estranei. Nessun carattere può essere più amabile e virtuoso; consideriamo queste azioni come prova della più grande umanità. Questa umanità conferisce merito alle azioni. Il rispetto per questo merito rappresenta quindi una considerazione secondaria e derivata dal principio antecedente dell'umanità che è meritorio e lodevole”. Hume ritiene che la sua teoria possa anche spiegare il potere motivante del senso del dovere – ma derubricandolo a fenomeno derivato e secondario: “quando un motivo o principio virtuoso è comune a tutti gli uomini, una persona che senta il suo cuore privo di questo motivo può odiarsi per questa ragione e compiere l'azione, pur senza quel motivo, per un certo senso del dovere, al fine di acquisire attraverso la pratica questo principio virtuoso o almeno per nascondere a se stesso, quanto è più possibile, l'assenza” (Hume 1987, 3.2.I.4,6,8). Qui Hume sembra dire che l'azione per senso del dovere deriva da un movente naturale, l'odio per se stessi e il confronto con gli altri. Nelle pagine successive del *Trattato sulla natura umana* Hume fornisce una spiegazione della motivazione derivante dal senso del dovere, e delle virtù artificiali, in termini di simpatia e convenzione, che non mi pare smentire questo punto. Il mio ragionamento nel testo si ispira a questi passi, almeno se interpretati nel senso di stabilire che il movente essenziale e originario per le nostre azioni – anche per le nostre azioni in conformità alla giustizia – non è mai principalmente il senso del dovere (e, quindi, nella terminologia di Hume, le virtù naturali sono motivazionalmente originarie). Una interpretazione simile è in (Harrison 1981). Una lettura diversa viene data da (Lecaldano 2008, 264–6; Magri 2015, 301–32).

agire. Il mio suggerimento è che, anzi, dalla prospettiva dell'agente, le cose stiano raramente così – anche se la considerazione retrospettiva, o la giustificazione riflessiva dei propri comportamenti, può invece richiamare principi generali e ragioni ulteriori che fanno appello all'imparzialità e all'universalità¹⁵. Ma attribuire agli agenti una preoccupazione per il giusto o il bene, come insieme di ragioni di un certo tipo, o per il senso della propria vita, è errato: come spiegava B. Williams, è attribuire loro “un pensiero di troppo”, una ragione di troppo, in questo caso¹⁶.

Per un certo individuo, ciò che da senso alla sua vita è la sua attività a favore dei migranti, oppure il suo impegno “per la trasformazione delle istituzioni, non solo in senso più democratico, ma anche in modo tale da permettere una più equa distribuzione delle risorse” (123); per un altro, la vita ha senso perché organizzata attorno a progetti artistici; per un altro ancora, il senso sta nei suoi percorsi di ricerca intellettuale; per un altro, infine, il senso della vita è la cura di sé. Assumiamo che questi progetti di vita siano tutti sostenuti da passioni e sentimenti autentici, e diano vita a caratteri continui e strutturati – potremmo chiamarli il filantropo, l'artista, l'intellettuale, l'epicureo. Se è così, nella concezione di

15 Ma si vedano le considerazioni di (Wolf 2012, 74–6).

16 Cfr. (Williams 1987a, 30) – si veda, su questa tesi di Williams (Wolf 2012; Wolf et al. 2010, 90). La mia obiezione alla tesi della classificazione s'ispira in parte al commento di Nomy Arpaly a Wolf in (Wolf et al. 2010, 89–90). Wolf riconosce parzialmente la critica di Arpaly in (Wolf et al. 2010, 116–9). Nella sua risposta ad Arpaly, ella sostiene che “la relazione fra significato [della vita] e ragioni d'amore [che per Wolf sono quelle che danno senso alla vita] è del tutto differente dalla relazione fra interesse personale e, per dire, ragioni del piacere, e fra moralità e, per dire, ragioni di generosità”. La differenza starebbe nel fatto che nel caso del piacere o della generosità venire a sapere che un certo piacere non conduce a massimizzare il proprio interesse o una certa azione generosa non è dettata, o è proibita, dalla moralità indurrebbe l'agente ad astenersene – fornendo una ragione ulteriore per agire. Mentre, nel caso delle ragioni per compiere azioni che danno senso alla nostra vita, le cose non starebbero così: se uno concludesse che dedicarsi a una certa attività, per esempio la pittura, non dà senso alla propria vita, questo non necessariamente darebbe ragione per non farlo, sostiene Wolf. Il fatto è, conclude Wolf, che “le azioni che contribuiscono al senso della vita di una persona saranno connesse all'amore o alla passione per cose che questi riconosce come dotate di valore indipendente. Per cui ella avrà altre ragioni, non connesse al senso della propria vita, per compierle [...]” Questa risposta mi sembra *ad hoc*. Si può dire che, se un'azione generosa – autenticamente generosa – è proibita dalla moralità, questo dà ragione di non farla? Sì, ma non soltanto, o soprattutto, perché essa è proibita dalla moralità, ma perché essa è, per esempio, parziale in un contesto dove l'imparzialità è richiesta – siedo nella commissione di un concorso pubblico e sono generoso con mio fratello, aiutandolo a superare l'esame – , o indulgente in un contesto dove la durezza è richiesta – sono un giudice e sono generoso con un criminale che ha fatto molte vittime, occultando le prove contro di lui. In termini più tecnici: il 'giusto' e il 'bene', intesi come concetti *sottili*, sopravvengono su concetti *spessi*, come 'generoso', 'imparziale', e così via. I tratti che rendono doverose le azioni, e che forniscono ragioni, sono quelli descritti dai concetti spessi. I concetti sottili, o le eventuali proprietà che essi descrivono, semplicemente sopravvengono sulle proprietà descritte dai concetti spessi. Sulla distinzione fra concetti *sottili* e *spessi*, cfr. (Williams 1986).

Lecaldano del senso della vita, tutti questi progetti sono egualmente plausibili e percorribili. Ma nessuno di questi tipi umani vedrà ciò che dà senso alla propria vita come appartenente a uno specifico orizzonte di valore, distinto da altri – come appartenente all'orizzonte della moralità, dell'estetica, della prudenza, o del senso della vita propriamente inteso. Nella sua consapevolezza intima, quando constata che la sua vita ha senso, il filantropo non dirà – almeno se non è un tipo umano diverso, cioè un moralista, o un filosofo morale eccessivamente concentrato sull'oggetto dei suoi studi – che la sua vita ha senso perché improntata alla moralità. È più probabile che egli affermerà, invece, che la sua vita ha senso perché aiutare i migranti è un valore indubbio, e perché egli trova in questo valore il senso della propria vita.

Proprio il quadro sentimentalista e particolarista di Lecaldano dovrebbe condurlo ad affermare che le persone agiscono per moventi specifici e particolari, e particolari e specifici sono i fattori che danno senso alla vita – e nessuno distingue, dall'interno, fra moralità e senso della vita. Pertanto, non c'è una distinzione concettuale fra moralità e senso della vita¹⁷. Piuttosto, ci sono differenti modalità per dare senso alla propria vita – alcune filantropiche o imparziali, altre non filantropiche e non imparziali, e così via. Lecaldano argomenta contro la concezione del senso della vita proposta da O. Flanagan – secondo cui il senso della vita consisterebbe nel conferire unità narrativa alla propria esistenza, lungo vari “spazi di significato”, la morale, la spiritualità, la creazione artistica, la tecnologia, la scienza e la politica¹⁸. Lecaldano formula la sua obiezione con le seguenti parole: “solo a posteriori è possibile eventualmente elaborare la narrazione di una biografia: prima, esiste solo la vita concreta di un essere umano” (121)¹⁹. Quella che sto muovendo qui è un'obiezione parallela a quella che Lecaldano pone a Flanagan: nello scorrere della vita concreta di un essere umano, quando questi dà senso di giorno in giorno alla propria vita, non c'è differenza percepita fra vari orizzonti di

17 Il punto è generale e si applicherebbe anche alla distinzione fra senso della vita e prudenza e fra moralità e prudenza. Da un punto di vista interno, dell'agente, non c'è distinzione fra ragioni prudenziali e morali, e fra queste e le ragioni che spingono a certe condotte che danno senso alla propria vita. Delle relazioni fra senso della vita e prudenza nella concezione di Lecaldano si occupa in parte il commento di L. Greco, in questo stesso numero di *Etica e politica/Ethics & Politics*.

18 Cfr. (Flanagan 2007, 183–210).

19 Curiosamente, L. Greco, nel suo contributo a questo stesso volume di *Etica e politica/Ethics & Politics*, attribuisce a Lecaldano una concezione narrativa dall'identità – da cui invece Lecaldano, criticando Flanagan, pare prendere le distanze, com'è evidente in questo passo: “è difficile conciliare questa interpretazione narrativistica con un'imprevedibile esigenza etica di eguaglianza, che [...] richiede che a nessun essere umano venga negata la possibilità di cercare un senso per la propria vita [...]. Anche per rispettare questa dimensione universale e inclusiva, ci sembra opportuno caratterizzare la tendenza a cercare un senso per la propria vita come una risorsa riflessiva umana che non richiede operazioni intellettuali o cognitive eccessivamente complesse [...]” (121).

valore. Certe passioni e certi sentimenti danno senso alla vita – e talvolta alcune di queste passioni e sentimenti possono coincidere con quelli che caratterizzano la vita morale. Ma non ci sono sentimenti specifici che danno senso alla vita e sentimenti specificamente morali. Altrimenti detto: il senso della vita è un orizzonte di valore, ma in esso agiscono concetti cosiddetti spessi, concetti come 'coraggioso', 'caritatevole', 'proporzionato', 'elegante', e non concetti sottili, come 'giusto' o 'buono', o 'bello' – come lo stesso Lecaldano riconosce (126)²⁰. All'interno dei concetti spessi non si fanno distinzioni concettuali come quella fra moralità ed estetica, o fra moralità e prudenza. All'interno dei concetti spessi c'è continuità fra quelle che, a uno sguardo classificatorio filosofico, possono sembrare sfere differenti. Di conseguenza, se il senso della vita va colto da una prospettiva interna, in prima persona, non si può distinguere fra moralità e senso della vita. La distinzione ha senso, se ce l'ha (alcuni dubbi vengono espressi sotto), solo da un punto di vista esterno, in terza persona.

3.2. L'instabilità di una distinzione senza indipendenza fra moralità e senso della vita

Se l'obiezione posta sopra è corretta, non ha senso distinguere fra senso della vita e moralità, ma ci sono solo valori e ragioni per agire specifici e diversi, non appartenenti a raggruppamenti o specie generali. Si noti però che la distinzione che Lecaldano pone fra moralità e senso della vita non è netta: le due sfere sarebbero distinte, ma non indipendenti – una vita completamente immorale, come quella di Hitler, non può aver senso, anche se una vita lievemente immorale, come quella di Gauguin, può averlo.

La mia seconda obiezione si rivolge alla tesi che sia possibile una distinzione senza indipendenza fra moralità e senso della vita. La distinzione senza indipendenza, per come la descrive Lecaldano, sembrerebbe implicare che i valori che danno senso alla vita e i valori morali si possano collocare su una scala unica (siano commensurabili). Di conseguenza, nella vita di Gauguin il valore della sua carriera artistica, che dà senso alla sua vita, sopravanza l'immoralità, per cui, pur se lievemente immorale, la sua vita è sensata. Al contrario, nella vita di Hitler l'immoralità annulla l'eventuale sensatezza, e l'esistenza del dittatore nazista è insensata. Il mio dubbio in questo caso riguarda due questioni: in primo luogo, la struttura del confronto fra i valori che il giudizio sulle due vite richiede; in secondo luogo, la plausibilità intuitiva del giudizio medesimo sulle due vite.

Com'è possibile che nel caso di Gauguin la sensatezza prevalga sul disvalore morale (“la grandezza del valore creato da Gauguin con la sua attività artistica è da

²⁰ Sui concetti spessi e sottili, vedi *supra* n. 16.

considerare *maggiore* del disvalore morale che si può attribuire alla sua condotta”, 56, corsivo aggiunto), mentre nel caso delle vite dei criminali nazisti il disvalore morale annulli il senso “proprio perché costruite intorno ad azioni malefiche, ad esse non accettiamo di attribuire *alcun* senso”, 56, corsivo aggiunto). Se i due valori – valori morali e senso della vita – si possono confrontare, cioè sono commensurabili, ma sono distinti, allora ci sarà un valore che prevale sull'altro, ma quest'ultimo sarà comunque presente: la vita di Gauguin sarà più sensata che immorale. Se i due valori, invece, si possono confrontare, sono commensurabili, ma uno può annullare completamente l'altro, senza residui, allora non si capisce perché essi siano distinti: se la vita di Hitler, proprio perché immorale, non è sensata, non si capisce perché una vita un po' meno immorale possa essere sensata, né perché una vita amorale possa essere sensata. Se la presenza di un grado elevato di immoralità annulla la sensatezza, allora la presenza di gradi anche meno elevati di immoralità non dovrebbero almeno diminuire la sensatezza? La vita di Gauguin non dovrebbe essere meno sensata di quella di Giorgio Perlasca²¹? E che dire della vita del giocatore compulsivo di videopoker? Essa è del tutto insensata perché affatto priva di impegno nei confronti degli altri, e quindi perché in essa la moralità è assente? Detto altrimenti: se la vita di Hitler è totalmente insensata, e la vita di Gauguin è sensata, pur essendo lievemente immorale, la vita di Giorgio Perlasca dovrebbe essere più sensata di quella di Gauguin, perché meno immorale, e la vita del giocatore compulsivo di videopoker del tutto insensata, perché del tutto amorale. Ma se questi giudizi sono accettabili, non c'è nessuna distinzione fra moralità e senso della vita: la moralità determina e vincola la sensatezza²².

Può essere utile schematizzare la posizione di Lecaldano e le posizioni alternative messe in luce dall'obiezione che sto esprimendo. Indicherò la posizione e i giudizi che essa implica sulle due vite che stiamo confrontando, cioè Gauguin e Hitler – giudizi che vertono appunto su due dimensioni, la sensatezza e la moralità. Lecaldano difende la seguente posizione:

21 Su Perlasca, cfr. (Deaglio 2013).

22 Nelle sue risposte ai commenti al suo saggio, Wolf sostiene che “lo scopo di articolare una concezione del senso della vita non è metterci nelle condizioni di collocare vite attuali o possibili su una scala di sensatezza. È facile farsi risucchiare nell'attività di dare un punteggio alle vite, di metterle a confronto e di discutere casi-limite. La vita di un poeta minore [...] è meno significativa di quella di un maggiore? Come si colloca la vita di una signora delle pulizie o di un istruttore di aerobica rispetto a quella di un giudice della Corte Suprema o di un attivista per le libertà? [...] Ad alcune di queste domande possono non esserci risposte, e non ha senso porsele, anche se ci fossero delle risposte” (Wolf et al. 2010, 108–9). Francamente, non capisco come ci si possa porre il problema del senso della vita senza partire dal confronto fra vite più o meno sensate. È un merito del libro di Lecaldano tenere sempre presente questo orizzonte. Inoltre, anche se su questi confronti non abbiamo intuizioni univoche, né risposte chiare, questo non vuol dire che porli e cercare di elaborare posizioni precise sia un'impresa senza senso.

1. *Distinzione senza indipendenza*

A. [Gauguin: vita sensata, pur se lievemente immorale] → **B.** [Hitler: vita insensata, perché mostruosamente immorale]

La mia obiezione sin qui è stata la seguente. Dire che la vita di Gauguin è sensata, pur essendo lievemente immorale, implica che sensatezza e immoralità siano distinte e che la prima possa compensare la seconda. Ma se la sensatezza può compensare l'immoralità, allora forse si dovrebbe dire che anche la vita di Hitler potrebbe essere sensata, nonostante l'immoralità mostruosa che la caratterizza – la sensatezza anche in questo caso dovrebbe controbilanciare l'immoralità. Ma se questo è inaccettabile, e si vuol dire invece che la vita di Hitler è talmente immorale che non può essere ritenuta sensata, allora bisognerà affermare che l'immoralità può determinare l'(in)sensatezza di certe vite – e quindi non c'è distinzione fra i due valori, e non c'è possibilità che la sensatezza compensi l'immoralità (e, tantomeno, che la moralità compensi l'insensatezza: la vita di un innocuo giocatore di videopoker, per quanto non immorale, non è sensata, né la vita di un conformista senza sentimenti e senza progetti, che si dedica a opere di filantropia, verrà resa sensata dalla moralità dei suoi atti).

Più formalmente, il problema è che se si rifiuta **B**, sostituendola con l'idea che la vita di Hitler sia sensata, nonostante tutto, si ottiene la seguente posizione:

2. *Indipendenza*

A. [Gauguin: vita sensata, pur se lievemente immorale] → **B***. [Hitler: vita sensata, pur se mostruosamente immorale].

Indipendenza a molti non parrà soddisfacente, perché accettarla vuol dire ammettere una forma di immoralismo, cioè ammettere che vite del tutto immorali possano avere un qualche valore.

D'altra parte, se rifiutiamo **B***, e vogliamo ritornare a **B**, allora potremmo ottenere la seguente visione:

3. *Unione*

A*. [Gauguin: vita insensata, perché lievemente immorale] → **B.** [Hitler: vita insensata, perché mostruosamente immorale].

Ma anche *Unione* a molti parrà inadeguata, perché implica una visione moralista, nella quale la moralità si estende a tutte le sfere della vita umana e ne determina il valore, sotto tutti i punti di vista, un modo di vedere evidentemente imperialista ed eccessivo, su cui ritornerò nel prossimo paragrafo.

Si potrebbe pensare che la differenza fra la vita di Gauguin e quella di Hitler sia di grado – che la vita del pittore sia del tutto sensata, perché solo lievemente immorale, e quella del dittatore sia appena sensata, proprio per la sua evidente immoralità (e quindi la vita di Perlasca è più sensata di quella di Gauguin, e quella di Schindler più sensata di quella di Perlasca, e così via). Questo modo di vedere si può esprimere più formalmente così:

4. *Determinazione*

A'. [Gauguin: vita del tutto sensata, perché lievemente immorale] → B'. [Hitler: vita appena sensata, perché mostruosamente immorale].

Ma anche *Determinazione* non riesce a tenere distinti moralità e senso della vita: in essa la moralità determina i gradi di sensatezza e non c'è vera distinzione, né indipendenza fra le due sfere. Quindi, anche in questo caso, non si evita il moralismo.

Dunque, o si separa del tutto moralità e senso della vita, cadendo nell'immoralismo, o si unificano le due sfere, accettando il moralismo. Una distinzione senza indipendenza sarebbe auspicabile, ma è concettualmente instabile e contraddittoria. Ancora una volta, se Gauguin ha una vita sensata, anche Hitler dovrebbe avercela, e se quest'ultimo non ce l'ha, neanche il primo può averla.

3.3. *La vita di Hitler e l'indipendenza fra senso della vita e moralità*

Sarà chiaro a questo punto che il mio dubbio maggiore riguarda il giudizio sull'insensatezza della vita di Hitler e altri criminali nazisti. Ciò porta alla mia terza obiezione. Se c'è una reale distinzione fra moralità e senso della vita, non si può dare un giudizio netto su vite drasticamente immorali²³. Né le argomentazioni che Lecaldano porta a sostegno di questo giudizio sono convincenti. Le ricordo: Lecaldano sostiene che le nostre reazioni di condanna verso certe condotte sono talmente accese che non possiamo considerare sensate vite del genere, né esse sarebbero per noi comprensibili, proprio come sarebbero incomprensibili vite

²³ Secondo Metz, una definizione plausibile di 'senso della vita' non deve "escludere analiticamente la possibilità che la vita di Adolf Hitler sia stata sensata" (Metz 2014, 5). Secondo John Kekes, "che vite immorali possano essere sensate è mostrato dagli innumerevoli devoti assassini di massa nazisti e comunisti, dai molti terroristi sinceramente impegnati nello scopo di destabilizzare una società o l'altra commettendo crimini oltraggiosi contro civili innocenti, e da persone la cui rabbia, risentimento, avidità, ambizione, egoismo, senso di superiorità o inferiorità danno senso alle proprie vite, spingendole a infliggere gravi e ingiustificati danni agli altri. Persone del genere possono impegnarsi con successo nei loro progetti, derivarne grandi soddisfazioni e trovare le loro vite [...] molto significative" (Kekes 2000, 30). Si vedano anche (Frankfurt 2002, 247–9; Wong 2008, 141 e n. 34).

affette da disturbi psicologici. Ora, le nostre reazioni di condanna, per quanto accese, si rivolgono agli aspetti morali delle vite dei gerarchi nazisti: se la moralità si distingue dalla sensatezza, queste reazioni non possono ancora dire nulla sul senso di quelle vite. Se invece queste reazioni dicono qualcosa sul senso di quelle vite, allora non c'è distinzione fra moralità e senso della vita, e vale la mia obiezione precedente – non si può dare una distinzione senza indipendenza fra moralità e sensatezza. Per quanto riguarda la comprensibilità, le vite dei gerarchi nazisti sono pienamente comprensibili, e forse sono comprensibili anche le vite delle persone affette da disturbi psicologici, come i terroristi, ammesso che i terroristi siano realmente paragonabili a chi soffre di patologie psicologiche, e ammesso che la vita di chi soffre di patologie del genere non sia sensata²⁴ – è la migliore letteratura a renderci comprensibili questi tipi umani: nel caso dei nazisti, si ricordi *Le benevole* di J. Littel, nel caso dei terroristi *kamikaze*, si prenda ad esempio *Il terrorista* di J. Updike, o il film *Unthinkable* di G. Jordan; nel caso di psicopatici privi di sentimenti morali, basti citare *Lo straniero*²⁵. E, infine, l'idea che vite drasticamente immorali non possano aver nessun valore, neanche il valore di essere vite sensate, assume di nuovo che il senso della vita sia determinato dalla moralità, negando qualsiasi distinzione.

L'unica maniera di distinguere plausibilmente fra moralità e senso della vita, a questo punto, diventa quella di assumere che ci sia indipendenza piena: la vita di Hitler può essere sensata e mostruosamente immorale, come la vita di Gauguin è sensata e lievemente immorale – senso della vita e moralità sono sfere del tutto separate. E, d'altra parte, se la vita del giocatore compulsivo di videopoker o la vita di chi si diverte solo a contare i fili d'erba del proprio giardino sono del tutto insensate, ci può essere la tentazione di dire che la vita di Hitler, per quanto enormemente più immorale, è sicuramente meno insensata.

Debbo confessare che non ho intuizioni chiare su questi casi. Una delle sfide interessanti della discussione sul senso della vita è che essa deve necessariamente partire da, e ritornare a, esempi di vite concrete e alle nostre intuizioni su di esse. Ma spesso le intuizioni non sono chiare abbastanza²⁶. Quello che ritengo si possa concludere dalle mie considerazioni è che o si assume che il senso della vita sia determinato dalla moralità, e allora le vite morali vissute in maniera piena e

²⁴ Su questo, cfr. (Wong 2008).

²⁵ Cfr. (Littell 2007; Updike 2007). *Le benevole* di Littell, uscito nel 2006, racconta le stragi naziste assumendo il punto di vista dei carnefici; *Il terrorista* di Updike, pubblicato nello stesso anno, racconta in prima persona la radicalizzazione di un cittadino americano di fede islamica, fino alla preparazione di un attentato. *Unthinkable*, di Jordan, del 2010, racconta una storia simile, dove la tortura inflitta da un *ex-marine* a un terrorista islamico di cittadinanza americana finisce per rendere ammirevole il coraggio e la determinazione dell'attentatore rispetto alla crudeltà del torturatore.

²⁶ Si veda *supra* n. 22.

autentica sono le più sensate, o si assume piena indipendenza fra moralità e senso della vita, e allora anche vite drasticamente immorali potrebbero essere del tutto sensate. O c'è unione fra moralità e senso della vita, o c'è indipendenza: la distinzione senza indipendenza è instabile.

Ma, come già detto, entrambe le prospettive – cioè unione e indipendenza – possono risultare inquietanti. Se concludiamo che solo le vite morali sono sensate, e la vita del filantropo ha più senso della vita dell'artista, ci può sembrare di cedere a un ristretto moralismo, opprimente e illiberale. Uno dei filosofi che ha inaugurato la discussione contemporanea sul senso della vita, B. Williams, muoveva proprio dall'idea di restringere la portata della moralità, e lasciare liberi dal giudizio morale ambiti della vita umana che potrebbero avere valore pur senza avere rilevanza morale²⁷. Se però concludiamo che anche vite drasticamente immorali possono avere senso, allora ci potrebbe sembrare di concedere troppo a una visione immoralista dell'esistenza. Ma una visione intermedia – vite lievemente immorali e vite amorali possono aver senso, ma non vite drasticamente immorali – è instabile e concettualmente ingiustificata. Il tema dei rapporti fra moralità e senso della vita richiede altra riflessione.

4. SENSO DELLA VITA, MORALITÀ E PROSPETTIVA SENTIMENTALISTICA

Per Lecaldano le risposte alla questione del senso della vita possono essere molte, e sempre rivedibili. Richiamando Mill, Lecaldano punta sull'autonomia, sul carattere e sugli esperimenti di vita come aspetti del percorso personale che ogni individuo compie per dare senso alla propria vita. Inoltre, la vita assume senso alla luce dei, e grazie ai, sentimenti stabili che costituiscono il carattere del soggetto. Nel paragrafo precedente ho messo in questione la possibilità di una distinzione senza indipendenza fra moralità e senso della vita, sostenendo che o la moralità determina il senso della vita o i due orizzonti sono del tutto indipendenti. Credo che anche alla luce della concezione sentimentalista di Lecaldano queste siano le uniche due opzioni possibili. Infatti, se si ammette che certi sentimenti e certi caratteri siano centrali e tipici nella natura umana – per esempio, se si assume che siano centrali e tipici sentimenti come l'orgoglio o il senso di giustizia –, allora si può pensare che certe vite siano esemplificazioni di caratteri devianti, per così dire, e quindi non siano sensate. Ma è difficile pensare che i sentimenti centrali e tipici

²⁷ Cfr. (Williams 1987a; Wolf et al. 2010, 55–9).

della natura umana non siano anche i sentimenti che costituiscono il nucleo di una moralità sentimentalista²⁸. Quindi, le vite insensate saranno anche vite immorali – e moralità e senso della vita saranno congiunti. La vita di Hitler è insensata perché attraversata da sentimenti distorti, e priva dei sentimenti tipici degli esseri umani, che ne costituiscono appunto la moralità – Hitler è semplicemente uno psicopatico²⁹. In questo senso, Hitler non è diverso dal personaggio dei *Demoni* di Dostoevskij, Stavrogin: in entrambi immoralità e psicopatia s'intrecciano e rendono del tutto insensata la loro esistenza.

Oppure, se si pensa che non ci sia una natura umana tipica, neanche statisticamente, ma che ci sia una pluralità irriducibile di sentimenti e caratteri possibili, allora sarà più difficile dire che certe vite sono insensate, anche se i sentimenti che le caratterizzano non fanno parte del nucleo della moralità. Si pensi di nuovo alle vite discusse nel paragrafo precedente. Consideriamo ancora una volta l'esistenza del giocatore compulsivo di videopoker, o la vita di un ipocrita seriale, come il protagonista de *L'impostore* di Cercas, che lo stesso Lecaldano ricorda (81)³⁰. Che cosa rende insensate queste vite? Alla luce della concezione sentimentalista di Lecaldano, ciò che le priva di senso potrebbe essere la mancanza assoluta di sentimenti continuativi, di relazioni affettive autentiche e strutturate – nel caso del giocatore – e di sentimenti autentici – nel caso dell'impostore. Ma, se la presenza di un insieme di sentimenti di questo genere è condizione necessaria e sufficiente della sensatezza di una vita, è difficile pronunciarsi sull'insensatezza dell'esistenza di Hitler. Egli certamente non ebbe i sentimenti morali riconosciuti da Hume e Smith – soprattutto la benevolenza –, ma il suo progetto di vita non si può dire inautentico, né i sentimenti che lo legavano alla sua distorta visione del mondo si possono dichiarare spuri. In un certo senso, Hitler si distanzia rispetto a Stavrogin: quest'ultimo passa la sua esistenza nell'insulsa ricerca di un senso pur che sia, attraverso tutta una serie di efferate e gratuite malvagità, e manifesta, insieme alla propensione al male, anche un'irrimediabile incapacità di dar senso alla sua esistenza. Di più: in realtà, Stavrogin mette in atto un maldestro tentativo di costruire in maniera perversa un senso della sua esistenza, manipolando i propri stessi ricordi, e cancellando le memorie delle passate efferatezze, ma la confessione e il colloquio con Tichon testimoniano l'inevitabile emergere dell'inautenticità e il rovinoso crollo dell'impresa manipolatoria – l'affiorare definitivo della mancanza di senso della vita di Stavrogin, o almeno della mancanza di un senso che non sia una vuota affermazione di se stesso. Hitler, invece, sicuramente vide un senso nella sua vita, dalla sua prospettiva, per quanto si trattasse anche nel suo caso di una vita

28 Cfr. (Lecaldano 2010, 101–6).

29 Cfr. (Langer e Heike 2013).

30 Cfr. (Cercas 2015).

organizzata intorno a efferate e gratuite malvagità (malvagità forse anche peggiori di quelle di Stavrogin, dato il numero delle vittime). In un certo senso, è la confessione di Stavrogin – o l'insuccesso della sua confessione in quanto tale – quel che mostra l'insensatezza della sua vita, e non (o non soltanto) le sue immorali imprese. In Hitler questa confessione manca, come manca anche il tentativo di affermare il proprio sé sino alla pretesa assurda di farsi contemporaneamente accusatore e accusato, e, almeno dal punto di vista interno, forse questo mette al riparo la vita del dittatore dall'insensatezza, anche se non certo da una profonda immoralità. Anzi, dal punto di vista della moralità, Hitler è certamente peggiore di Stavrogin – come un assassino di massa è peggiore di un assassino di singoli. Dal punto di vista della sensatezza, però, non è chiaro come stiano le cose e si può sospettare che la vita di Stavrogin sia totalmente insensata, o molto più insensata di quella di Hitler.

Per allontanare da noi lo spettro dell'immoralismo e dell'indulgenza nei confronti della malvagità, insomma, non è detto che possiamo dire che la vita di Hitler fu insensata – anche perché facendolo non riusciremmo forse a distinguere la vita di Hitler dall'assurdità evidente della vita di Stavrogin. Forse dovremmo dire che anche vite di questo genere possono avere senso, ma che il senso della vita non è tutto – e la moralità deve avere l'ultima parola. Oppure, dovremmo dire che non c'è senso in vite immorali – né lievemente, né grandemente immorali. O, più moderatamente, che il massimo del senso sta nelle vite morali, anche se residui di senso possono ritrovarsi in vite lievemente immorali³¹.

La prospettiva sentimentalista di Lecaldano sul senso della vita ha molti meriti: essa riconosce l'inevitabile soggettività dei nostri giudizi sul senso delle nostre vite, nonché il ruolo necessario delle emozioni e dei sentimenti nel dare senso alle nostre esistenze. In più, essendo inserita in un quadro naturalista, essa evita molti problemi metafisici e logici di concezioni più oggettiviste o soprannaturaliste. Ma essa eredita un'impostazione delle relazioni fra moralità e senso della vita che rende impossibile una opzione intermedia fra due estremi – o completa indipendenza fra moralità e sensatezza, o predominio della moralità. In molti casi entrambe le opzioni sono insoddisfacenti: non ci rassegniamo a considerare sensata la vita di Hitler, ma la riterremo ancora più insensata di quella del giocatore di videopoker? Allo stesso tempo, vorremmo considerare sensata l'esistenza di Gauguin, e considerarla sensata quanto quella di Giorgio Perlasca. Ogni tentativo futuro di indagare filosoficamente sul senso della vita dovrà lavorare nella

31 Una discussione molto interessante del personaggio di Stavrogin, nel contesto di una riflessione generale su moralità, letteratura e psicanalisi, è in (Coetzee e Kurtz 2017, cap. 4).

direzione di una terza via, che sia stabile e non *ad hoc*, fra questi due estremi. Il contributo di Lecaldano è sicuramente un necessario punto di partenza.

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IL SENSO DELLA VITA IN UN MONDO DARWINIANO

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ABSTRACT

Eugenio Lecaldano's book *Sul senso della vita* places the discussion about the meaning of life in a naturalized and evolutionary framework. Following his suggestion about the relevance of Darwinism for the enquiry about the meaning of life the topic of the relation between such enquiry and science is put under focus. Three possible relations between science and the meaning of life are examined: 1) scientific research about why and how human beings are interested into meaning of life; 2) scientific practice as an activity that gives meaning to life; 3) scientific data as a source for everybody's research about meaning of life. With a special regard to this latter option, the picture of the living world emerging from Darwinian theory is a rich source of hints for personal reflection about one's own meaning of life. In the end, some examples will be provided.

KEYWORDS

Meaning of life, science, evolutionary theory, non-human animals, environment

1. Il volume di Eugenio Lecaldano, *Sul senso della vita*¹, affronta un tema tanto diffuso nell'esperienza ordinaria degli esseri umani quanto sfuggente e ostico all'analisi filosofica rigorosa. Come puntualmente sottolinea Lecaldano all'avvio del suo lavoro l'interrogativo sul senso della vita caratterizza in modo pressoché universale la vita degli esseri umani. La presenza di questo interrogativo è uno dei tratti che siamo abituati a considerare come qualificante in un'esistenza propriamente umana. Per quanto questa esperienza sia comune e tipica dell'esperienza degli esseri umani, essa appare in qualche misura resistente agli sforzi di analisi filosofica. La natura di questa resistenza è colta puntualmente dall'analisi di Lecaldano, nel momento in cui afferma che la questione del senso della vita può essere declinata solo nella dimensione individuale (p. 9 e segg.). Per rispondere a questa domanda, infatti, non si danno "ricette" o prescrizioni che possano ritenersi universalmente valide per tutti gli esseri umani. Laddove la filosofia ambisca a una qualche pretesa normativa in questo campo, essa appare destinata a fallire, nella misura in cui il confronto con l'esperienza comune degli

¹ E. Lecaldano, *Sul senso della vita*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2016.

esseri umani ci mostra la resistenza di questa stessa esperienza a soluzioni normative precostituite (p. 53). Questa osservazione è l'indicazione metodologica che struttura il lavoro condotto da Lecaldano.

Il compito dell'analisi filosofica in questo ambito deve essere rivolto all'esame della natura di questa area di esperienza umana e delle sue condizioni di possibilità. Nel fare ciò l'esame non può soffermarsi su astratte concezioni della vita umana, ma deve guardare alle vite individuali delle persone reali che nel corso della propria esistenza si trovano ad affrontare la questione del senso della vita (p. 22). Anche per queste ragioni l'analisi sul senso della vita non può essere identificata e assimilata al campo di ricerca dell'etica. Quest'area di indagine (e la dimensione di esperienza di cui essa si occupa), infatti, è caratterizzata da pretese di universalità (o più debolmente di generalità) che non appartengono agli interrogativi circa il senso della vita (p. 53). Il particolarismo strutturale della ricerca sul senso della vita mantiene distante questo campo da quello dell'etica, sebbene i due ambiti siano comunicanti, giacché vite votate alla violenza e alla sopraffazione di altri esseri senzienti (e che in questa attività trovano senso) non sono apprezzabili (p. 57). Casi come questo (e non solo) non solo mostrano l'intreccio fra la dimensione morale e quella del senso della vita, ma mettono in luce altri punti di contatto e differenza fra le due aree di esperienza. La ricerca sul senso della vita è sempre declinata in modo particolaristico e, tuttavia, essa non è impermeabile alla comprensione (e valutazione) altrui. La storia di Gauguin, che viene meno ai suoi impegni familiari per la vita artistica, può non essere catturata dalla valutazione morale, che con difficoltà potrebbe ritenere generalmente apprezzabile il venire meno a determinate responsabilità. La stessa storia, tuttavia, può risaltarci pienamente comprensibile (e apprezzabile), nel momento in cui adottiamo simpateticamente il punto di vista di Gauguin che cerca di dare un senso alla propria vita. A rendere comprensibile la sua biografia non è tuttavia solo il fatto che, a posteriori, riconosciamo che Gauguin è diventato un grande artista e quindi la sua scelta ha portato a un "successo". Non è la riuscita a determinare il senso di una vita. Se così fosse, ad esempio, non potremmo simpatizzare e comprendere la biografia di Christopher McCandless (la cui storia è stata raccontata da S. Penn nel film *Into the wild*). In una ricerca - a tratti disperata - di un modo di vivere autentico a contatto con la natura, McCandless finisce tragicamente la sua vita in giovane età, ma difficilmente la sua biografia ci apparirà insensata (a meno di non giudicarla sulla scorta di un qualche pregiudizio moralistico).

2. La ricerca sul senso della vita si declina, pertanto, solo in una metrica particolaristica, ma essa è sempre aperta alla possibilità di comprensione e simpatizzazione degli esseri umani. Essa avviene in un contesto "pubblico" e proprio questo carattere di apertura è quello che consente l'articolazione della

analisi di Lecaldano. Se, infatti, non si danno “ricette” normative per le concrete interrogazioni personali, è possibile operare una ricognizione sulla natura di questa ricerca (e comprenderne il particolarismo, appunto) e sui contesti in cui, data la vita umana così come la conosciamo, essa possa fiorire. Nell’operare questa analisi, Lecaldano esercita un’opzione di tipo naturalistico. Questa opzione comporta anzitutto il riconoscimento della non percorribilità di scenari di tipo spiritualistico e religioso, in quanto incompatibili con una interrogazione sul senso della vita che si collochi adeguatamente nelle reali condizioni di esistenza dell’essere umano: “Muoversi in un’orizzonte religioso significa esigere per la sensatezza della nostra esistenza delle condizioni che non hanno niente a che fare con le reali precarietà, fragilità e finitezza in cui viviamo” (p. 36). Per tale ragione, l’analisi di Lecaldano conduce alla discussione circa il senso della vita in quella che è la migliore prospettiva di comprensione delle condizioni della vita umana (e non solo) che la scienza oggi ci mette a disposizione, ovvero l’evoluzionismo darwiniano (p. 95 e segg.).

Collocare il tema del senso della vita sulla scena dell’evoluzionismo consente di riformulare alcune delle questioni portanti di tale ricerca, come quelle ad esempio che riguardano l’origine delle nostre individualità e la loro comparsa su questo pianeta (pp. 95-96).² Vorrei prendere spunto dalla connessione avanzata da Lecaldano per discutere più analiticamente il tema dell’intreccio fra ricerca del senso della vita e conoscenza scientifica. Nell’approccio naturalistico sostenuto da Lecaldano, infatti, la scienza gioca un ruolo primario per una possibilità di sviluppo di tale ricerca. Pur mantenendo ferma, infatti, l’assunzione circa la non normatività dell’esame di tale area di esperienza, l’analisi individua in una ricerca che si colloca in uno scenario naturalistico possibilità di articolazione e fioritura che non appaiono disponibili, ad esempio, in un contesto di credenze religiose e soprannaturali.

Muovendo da questa proposta di Lecaldano si può elaborare anzitutto una tassonomia dei possibili modi in cui l’interrogarsi sul senso della vita e la ricerca/conoscenza scientifica entrano in comunicazione. Si tratta di tre modalità che presentano importanti e intrecciati canali di comunicazione, ma che qui si presentano separatamente per condurre una loro breve discussione. Anzitutto, c’è la possibilità che la scienza sottoponga ai propri metodi di indagine l’area di esperienza della ricerca sul senso della vita. In secondo luogo, c’è la scienza come attività concreta di esseri umani che in questa pratica danno senso alla propria

² Coerentemente con l’impostazione naturalistica dobbiamo considerare rilevante l’evoluzionismo darwiniano solo finché permangono alcune condizioni della nostra esistenza come animali umani. Come sottolinea Lecaldano la condizione dell’immortalità cambierebbe a tale punto l’esistenza degli esseri umani da rendere del tutto inefficaci le nostre attuali possibilità riflessive sul senso della vita (p. 65). A questo aggiungiamo che la condizione dell’immortalità ci sottrarrebbe dai meccanismi dell’evoluzione, nei quali morte degli individui ed estinzione delle specie giocano un ruolo essenziale.

esistenza. Infine, c'è la scienza come fonte di conoscenze che entrano nelle personali riflessioni circa il senso della vita.

3. Per quanto attiene alla prima modalità, in un contesto naturalistico l'idea che la ricerca umana sul senso della vita possa essere oggetto di indagine scientifica non solo è del tutto ammissibile, ma anche auspicabile. Proprio la cornice dell'evoluzionismo ci consente di individuare in questa particolare area di esperienza una peculiarità della specie *Homo sapiens*. Allo stato attuale delle nostre conoscenze l'attività di interrogarsi in tale senso sembra essere un tratto esclusivo degli esseri umani. Tuttavia, proprio perché ci si muove in una prospettiva naturalizzata, tale esclusività deve essere considerata per quello che è, ovvero un fenomeno che si è realizzato nelle dinamiche evolutive che governano tutti i viventi. Una "scienza del senso della vita", quindi, potrà interrogarsi sulla storia evolutiva che ha portato il primate *Homo sapiens* a questa ricerca. In questa prospettiva, quindi, dovremo considerare l'attuale modo in cui noi umani ci poniamo il problema del senso della vita come l'ultimo capitolo (sinora) di una storia nel cui passato i nostri antenati erano impegnati in condotte che erano le progenitrici di questa nostra quotidiana e pervasiva ricerca. In questa prospettiva, quindi, dobbiamo considerare tale attività come l'esito di accumuli e di trasformazioni di attività riflessive (e "proto-riflessive") che hanno impegnato i nostri antenati. In tale senso, quindi, ciò che noi facciamo oggi riflettendo sul senso della vita non è qualcosa che ci appartiene da sempre (così come non da sempre c'è l'*Homo sapiens* attuale) né che può esistere solo nella forma che conosciamo oggi.

Inoltre, acquisire una prospettiva evoluzionistica sul senso della vita può consentire di stemperare e contestualizzare l'idea della esclusività umana rispetto a tale dimensione di esperienza. È sicuramente vero che il modo in cui gli umani si interrogano sulla propria singolare esistenza sembra non avere eguali nel mondo vivente a noi conosciuto e, tuttavia, non è da escludere che in altre specie si presentino attività mentali e comportamentali che, dal punto di vista filogenetico, sono riconducibili a quelle stesse che, nel corso della storia evolutiva dell'*Homo sapiens*, hanno rappresentato i prodromi di ciò che è ora. Oggi è ormai chiaro, ad esempio, che empatia, altruismo e cooperazione non sono esclusiva della specie umana, ma sono tratti ampiamente diffusi fra gli animali non umani (e il loro studio può dirci molto sulle origini e la natura della nostra condotta morale). Sebbene in noi umani la riflessione sul senso della vita sia inestricabilmente intrecciata a una forma di pensiero linguisticamente articolato, non possiamo escludere che animali non umani, come il nostro parente più prossimo scimpanzé (*Pan paniscus*), provino ad esempio una qualche emozione di "meraviglia" e "stupore" che li distolga dalle loro attività più ordinarie e quotidiane. Primatologi

che lavorano sul campo riferiscono spesso di atteggiamenti degli animali da loro osservati che sembrerebbero far ipotizzare esperienze del genere.³ Allo stesso modo, non tutti gli animali sembrano indifferenti alla morte e, per quanto intricato e scivoloso, il campo di studio sul lutto e un possibile “senso della morte” negli animali è quanto mai aperto e vivace. Al netto di tutte le cautele circa le possibili interpretazioni antropomorfe, l'impostazione naturalistica non può escludere in linea di principio che negli animali non umani si diano comportamenti che rappresentano i “mattoni da costruzione”⁴ dell'interrogarsi sul senso della vita. Al di là del valore conoscitivo di una contestualizzazione evoluzionistica, possiamo avanzare l'idea che questa possa entrare nelle nostre stesse riflessioni sul senso della vita, fornendoci una prospettiva non antropocentrica da cui muovere il nostro interrogarci (di questo modo in cui l'evoluzionismo può essere fonte della riflessione si dirà dopo).

4. La seconda possibilità di intreccio fra la domanda sul senso della vita e la scienza è rappresentata dall'attività di ricerca scientifica così come essa viene esercitata nelle vite concrete e particolari di coloro che la esercitano. La lettura delle storie di esseri umani che hanno dedicato la propria vita alla scienza è illuminante in questo senso. Anche in questo caso è opportuno tenere presenti le indicazioni avanzate da Lecaldano per non cadere nell'errore di pensare che la ricerca scientifica conferisca di per sé senso alla vita o sia un modo privilegiato per dare risposta a quell'interrogativo. D'altra parte, proprio la lettura di quelle specifiche biografie ci mostra come ciò possa avvenire. Volendo rimanere nel contesto dell'evoluzionismo, possiamo ad esempio guardare alla biografia di Charles Darwin come un esempio illuminante di questa possibilità. Non si può qui scendere nel dettaglio di questo esame.⁵ Ci si può limitare a rilevare come in nella vita del naturalista inglese la passione della curiosità per il mondo vivente abbia rappresentato un tratto costante del suo carattere sin dalla giovinezza⁶ e di come

³ Si veda ad esempio: J. Goodall, “Primate spirituality”, B. Taylor (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, Thoemmes Continuum, New York, 2005, pp. 1303-1306.

⁴ L'espressione “mattoni da costruzione” indica capacità il cui ruolo è analogo a quello delle capacità “mattoni da costruzione” della morale indicate da J. Flack & F. De Waal, ‘*Any animal whatever*’. *Darwinian building blocks of morality*, «Journal of Consciousness Studies», 2000, VII, 1-2, pp. 1-29.

⁵ Per la biografia di Darwin si vedano: J. Browne, *Charles Darwin. Vol. 1 Voyaging*, Pimlico, London, 2003; Id. *Charles Darwin. Vol 2 The Power of Place*, Pimlico, London, 2003; C. Darwin, *Autobiografia (1809-1882)*, Einaudi, Torino, 2006; C. Darwin, *Viaggio di un naturalista intorno al mondo*, Giunti, Milano, 2002; A. Desmond & J. Moore, *Darwin*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino, 1992; R. Keynes, *Casa Darwin. Il male, il bene e l'evoluzione dell'uomo*, Einaudi, Torino, 2007.

⁶ “Ma a Cambridge nessuna occupazione m'interessò tanto e mi dette tanto piacere quanto la raccolta degli insetti. Era una pura e semplice passione di collezionista, infatti non facevo mai dissezioni e di rado confrontavo i caratteri esterni con le descrizioni pubblicate, ma in qualche modo

nel corso della sua esistenza la dimensione personale, degli affetti e delle relazioni, sia stata sempre intrecciata all'esercizio di questa curiosità. In generale, la peculiarità di questo tratto inquisitivo, che vediamo all'opera nella vita di Darwin è quello di mettere continuamente in discussione lo sfondo sul quale le nostre vite sono nate e si sono inizialmente sviluppate. Fu così per Darwin quando giunse alla convinzione che, contro le sue opinioni di partenza, tutte le prove accumulate mostrassero che le specie mutano nel corso del tempo. Il fatto che Darwin, in una lettera all'amico Hooker, dichiarasse che affermare questa nuova opinione equivalesse a "confessare di avere commesso un assassinio"⁷ mostra come le acquisizioni della scienza, nel momento in cui entrano in conflitto con quanto ad esempio abbiamo ricevuto dalla tradizione, possano essere un elemento turbativo e trasformativo. La biografia di Darwin, d'altra parte, evidenzia come il rigore e la passione nel perseguire la conoscenza si intrecci anche con le relazioni e gli affetti più intimi. Ne è testimonianza, ad esempio, il rapporto con la moglie Emma Wedgwood, donna dalle forti convinzioni religiose, e il modo in cui il graduale passaggio all'agnosticismo di Darwin entrò nel loro rapporto, pur senza metterne in discussione la solidità.⁸ Senza che da essa si possano pretendere indicazioni normative e universali, tuttavia, la storia personale di Darwin mostra in che modo una vita possa trovare senso nel perseguimento della conoscenza scientifica e in questa attività trasformarsi riflessivamente.⁹

riuscivo a trovare il nome degli insetti. Ecco una prova del mio zelo: un giorno, strappando una vecchia cortecchia d'albero, vidi due coleotteri rari e li presi, uno in mano, l'altro nell'altra; poi alla vista di un terzo di tipo nuovo, che non volevo perdere, mi misi in bocca quello che tenevo nella mano destra. Ma, ahimè, l'insetto emise un liquido acre che faceva bruciare la lingua, così fui costretto a sputarlo e lo persi, come avvenne anche del terzo" (C. Darwin, *Autobiografia (1809-1882)*, cit., pp. 43-44).

⁷ C. Darwin, "Lettera a J.D. Hooker (11 gennaio 1844)", in *Lettere 1825-1859*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano, 1999, p. 110.

⁸ Significativa in proposito è, ad esempio, l'episodio di una lettera che Emma scrisse a Charles: "... Charles aveva perduto molti dei suoi scrupoli sullo scetticismo religioso, liquidandoli nei suoi appunti come 'un sentimento irragionevole o superstizioso'. Emma vedeva che il suo mondo privato lo stava portando in acque pericolose: l'abito mentale di 'non credere a nulla prima che venga dimostrato' gli impediva di prendere in considerazione 'altre cose che non possono venir dimostrate nello stesso modo e che, se sono vere, sono probabilmente al di sopra della nostra intelligenza'. L'idea che Charles potesse rinunciare alla rivelazione di Cristo sulla vita eterna, sacrificando la sua salvezza, la torturava. Fin da quando aveva perduto la sua amata sorella Fanny era vissuta nella speranza 'di trovarsi di nuovo con lei per non lasciarla mai più', e nei confronti del suo caro marito nutriva la stessa speranza di essere con lui per l'eternità. Ma temeva che a causa dei suoi dubbi la morte potesse separarli. Sarebbe stato per lei un vero incubo, così terminava la lettera, 'se credessi davvero che non ci apparteniamo per sempre'". (A. Desmond & J. Moore, *Darwin*, cit., pp. 321-322)

⁹ Come già detto la vocazione e dedizione alla ricerca scientifica di per sé non è garanzia di una ricerca sul senso della vita che possa "soddisfare" chi la mette in pratica o sulla quale possiamo convergere simpateticamente. Pensiamo al caso del medico nazista Joseph Mengele e di come nella sua vita la ricerca scientifica fu completamente asservita alle idee criminali e omicide del regime nazista. Si potrebbe forse replicare che quella di Mengele non era una autentica curiosità scientifica e che quindi la sua non era autenticamente ricerca. È un tema intricato che non si può qui sviluppare, ma ci si può

5. La vita di Darwin (e altri scienziati) testimonia l'intreccio fra conoscenza scientifica e interrogazione sul senso della vita. Tuttavia, la scienza, intesa come l'insieme delle diverse acquisizioni di queste attività, può avere un ruolo anche nella ricerca di chi non è direttamente coinvolto nella sua pratica. Essa, cioè, può essere una fonte per l'attività riflessiva degli singoli esseri umani impegnati nelle domande circa il senso della vita. È a questo senso che più direttamente si riferisce Lecaldano chiamando in causa l'evoluzionismo nella sua analisi. Contrariamente a resoconti di ordine religioso e soprannaturale, nella biologia possiamo trovare risposte ad alcune delle domande che nella esperienza comune innescano l'interrogativo sul senso della propria vita, come quella circa l'origine e le ragioni della nostra presenza sulla Terra, tanto come specie quanto come singoli e particolari individui. Laddove in genere le religioni propongono narrazioni finalistiche, la ricostruzione scientifica e naturalistica sottolinea il ruolo della contingenza e della casualità (pp. 95-102). Solo apparentemente questa risposta può suonare meno rassicurante di quella dei racconti finalistici. Se, infatti, guardiamo la questione da una prospettiva diversa la nostra presenza (come specie e come singoli) non può che darci un senso di meraviglia, giacché - per dirla con Richard Dawkins - *“per quanti modi possano esserci di essere in vita, è certo che esistono molti più modi di essere morti, o piuttosto non vivi”*.¹⁰ La falsificazione dell'antropocentrismo prodotta dall'evoluzionismo darwiniano non produce come conseguenza necessaria sentimenti di insensatezza e disperazione. L'assenza di un progetto sottostante e l'assoluta contingenza delle nostre esistenze possono produrre sentimenti di meraviglia e gioia. Allo stesso modo la prospettiva evoluzionistica conferma l'affermazione di Hume, citata da Lecaldano, che *“per l'universo la vita di un uomo non è più importante di quella di un'ostrica”* (p. 98). Questa affermazione si trova nel saggio humeano *Sul suicidio* ed esprime l'idea che laddove si tratti di decisioni come quelle sollevate nel contesto del suicidio razionale non possiamo rivolgerci a presunti ordini naturali, ma dobbiamo guardare al nostro carattere e alle relazioni rilevanti che segnano la nostra vita.¹¹ La prospettiva in cui ci mette lo scenario darwiniano è proprio questa: la ricerca sul senso della vita può fiorire se guarda alla coltivazione della nostra soggettività e alle relazioni piuttosto che entrare nel vicolo cieco della ricerca di una corrispondenza a ordini dati e situati oltre la nostra esperienza sensibile.

limitare a osservare come nel dare una risposta del genere si corra il rischio di una moralizzazione della scienza, distinguendo fra *“vera scienza”* (moralmente adeguata) e *“falsa scienza”* (moralmente riprensibile). L'intreccio fra scienza e morale c'è e la pratica della ricerca scientifica non è moralmente neutra, ma l'intreccio non è così semplice e scontato.

¹⁰ R. Dawkins, *L'orologio cieco. Creazione o evoluzione?*, Mondadori, Milano, 2003, p. 28.

¹¹ D. Hume, *Sul suicidio*, in Id., *Sul suicidio e altri saggi morali*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2008.

Il possibile contributo della comprensione evoluzionistica del mondo alla ricerca sul senso della vita non si esaurisce in questa riconfigurazione del quadro nel quale tentare una risposta a domande su origine e ragioni della nostra esistenza. L'immagine darwiniana del mondo, infatti, ci mette davanti alcuni "fatti" che possono alimentare la nostra personale riflessione. Come nel caso della riflessione morale, anche in questa circostanza il rapporto fra descrizioni e valutazioni si presenta come un tema intricato e il percorso dalle prime alle seconde non è di per sé immediato e lineare. Che il modo in cui comprendiamo il mondo e i "fatti" che diamo per acquisiti non solo comunichino con la nostra attività valutativa (morale e non solo), ma in una certa misura plasmino le nostre valutazioni è fuori di dubbio. Così come nel caso delle nostre valutazioni morali, un elemento strutturale del nostro interrogarci sul senso della vita sembra essere la richiesta che le risposte "corrispondano" in modo appropriato al mondo così come esso è.¹² Molta della riflessione delle persone sul senso della propria vita si gioca intorno alla nozione di "autenticità": difficilmente si può arrivare a immaginare come sensata una vita che si basi in modo strutturale sull'autoinganno e su un'immagine della realtà falsa e manipolata (pp. 82-83). Il desiderio che la nostra vita aderisca alla "realtà" dei fatti è quindi parte dell'esperienza di riflettere sul senso della nostra esistenza. Per tale ragione alla scienza possiamo chiedere un contributo importante nel disegnare un'immagine della realtà autentica e con la quale sintonizzare le nostre personali riflessioni.

6. Dei diversi tasselli che compongono questa immagine vorrei qui menzionarne altri due, oltre quanto si è già detto più sopra circa l'antifinalismo e l'antiantropocentrismo. Anzitutto, una comprensione adeguata delle dinamiche evolutive darwiniane ci mostra un orientamento del vivente verso condizioni di benessere e felicità. Il darwinismo è stato recepito a lungo (ancora oggi lo è, in verità) come una visione del mondo in cui dominano lotta, competizione ed egoismo, oscurando tutta una serie di altri elementi che una sua lettura corretta mette in luce. Fra questi c'è il fatto che la selezione naturale "premia" gli organismi in condizioni di "felicità" e benessere. Questo fatto, che Darwin rimarcava nella propria autobiografia nel momento di fare un bilancio tanto della sua vita quanto della propria teoria,¹³ può darci alcune coordinate per le nostre personali riflessioni. Pur senza cadere nell'errore di vedere nei meccanismi dell'evoluzione un orientamento garantito verso la felicità e il benessere, l'acquisizione di questo fatto ci mostra, in un'interpretazione minimale, che sacrificio, rinuncia e sofferenza non

¹² Per un approfondimento di questo punto, ma nel contesto della valutazione morale: S. Pollo, "Progresso morale e progresso scientifico. Sentimentalismo, oggettività e scienza", *Rivista di filosofia*, 2016, CVII, 2, pp. 219-240

¹³ C. Darwin, *Autobiografia*, cit., pp. 70-71.

sono affatto richiesti da alcun presunto ordine naturale. Questa interpretazione minimale potrebbe essere ampliata e spinta più oltre fino a sostenere che una ricerca di senso che connetta la fioritura personale al sacrificio sembra contraddire un dato fondamentale della nostra esistenza come animali umani.¹⁴ Pur non giustificando di per sé una declinazione meramente edonistica della ricerca sul senso della vita (sulla cui analisi critica si sofferma dettagliatamente Lecaldano: pp. 107-109), tale fatto segnala una dimensione importante per la fioritura personale: guardare alle nostre vite e nella loro integrità, ovvero anche negli aspetti della corporeità e dei suoi diversi modi di fioritura e benessere. Possiamo mantenere ferma l'idea avanzata da Lecaldano per cui la ricerca sul senso della vita rimane indipendente da quella della felicità e del benessere (p. 58) e, al tempo stesso, ritenere che queste non siano di ostacolo nella ricerca sul senso della vita.

Un'ulteriore acquisizione del darwinismo che può entrare nelle nostre riflessioni riguarda la natura intrinsecamente relazionale delle vite sulla Terra, quella umana inclusa. Tali relazioni non sono solo quelle che ci riguardano in senso intraspecifico come animali sociali, ma sono anche quelle interspecifiche. La comprensione della nostra "natura" di *Homo sapiens* e della sua genealogia non può prescindere dalla dimensione ecologica: dai microrganismi che colonizzano il nostro corpo al mondo vegetale e al suo ruolo nel mantenimento di condizioni favorevoli alla vita, fino alle specie animali che, domesticate, hanno consentito la particolare forma di vita che oggi ci caratterizza.¹⁵ La comprensione della natura relazionale della nostra vita di *Homo sapiens* può avere molte ricadute per la riflessione sul senso della vita. Di queste se ne può menzionare almeno una e che riguarda il rapporto che ognuno di noi intrattiene con l'ambiente naturale. Avendo presente l'intima e profonda

¹⁴ A questo proposito non si può non richiamare Hume sulle cosiddette "virtù monacali": "E poiché ogni qualità che è utile o piacevole a noi stessi o agli altri si ammette nella vita quotidiana che sia una parte del merito che si riconosce ad una persona, così nessun'altra qualità verrà mai accolta laddove l'uomo giudichi delle cose colla sua ragione naturale priva di pregiudizi, all'infuori delle ingannevoli spiegazioni fornite dalla superstizione e dalla falsa religione. Il celibato, il digiuno, la penitenza, la mortificazione, l'abnegazione, l'umiltà, il silenzio, la solitudine e tutto il complesso delle virtù monacali: per quale ragione tutto ciò viene ovunque respinto dagli uomini di buon senso, se non perché non serve a risultati di alcun genere, né fa progredire la fortuna di una persona nel mondo, né la rende un membro più apprezzabile nella società, né la fa idonea a divertire una compagnia di amici, né aumenta la sua capacità di godimento interiore? Osserviamo, al contrario, che le dette qualità sono di ostacolo a tutti questi fini desiderabili; esse infatti rendono ottusa l'intelligenza e induriscono il cuore, oscurano la fantasia e inaspriscono il carattere. Giustamente, dunque, noi trasportiamo queste qualità nella colonna opposta e le collochiamo nel catalogo dei vizi. Né alcuna superstizione ha forza bastante fra gli uomini del mondo per giungere a pervertire interamente questi sentimenti naturali. Un malinconico o scervellato fanatico, dopo la morte, può trovare un posto nel calendario; ma, da vivo, non sarà mai accolto nell'intimità e nella compagnia se non di coloro che sono pazzi o malinconici come lui" (D. Hume, *Ricerca sui principi della morale*, in Id., *Opere*, Vol. 2, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 1987, pp. 286-287).

¹⁵ Su questo ultimo aspetto rimando a: S. Pollo, *Umani e animali: questioni di etica*, Carocci, Roma, 2016.

relazionalità che ci caratterizza come animali umani, l'ambiente potrà apparirci non solo come una "risorsa" esterna da consumare o proteggere a seconda dei casi, ma come un elemento che è parte della nostra stessa soggettività.¹⁶ Anche in questo caso sarebbe scorretto e inappropriato immaginare una diretta ed esplicita ricaduta normativa per le specifiche riflessioni umane, ma ci si può limitare a sottolineare come nell'orizzonte darwiniano un'interrogazione sulla propria esistenza possa arricchirsi di una concezione della soggettività aperta in senso non antropocentrico alle relazioni con il mondo non umano in una prospettiva ecologica.

7. Si è qui provato a dare alcuni spunti per un'ulteriore articolazione del nodo teorico presentato da Lecaldano nell'indicare l'orizzonte naturalistico-evoluzionistico come il contesto più appropriato per un'interrogazione sul senso della vita. In conclusione di questo tentativo si può avanzare un'ultima osservazione. Se - come correttamente osserva Lecaldano - le nostre specifiche riflessioni sul senso della vita hanno un'inevitabile dimensione pubblica, non possiamo che auspicare che una società liberale interessata allo sviluppo personale dei suoi cittadini (p. 122 e segg.) diffonda l'educazione e la conoscenza scientifica. Questo auspicio va fatto valere contro il luogo comune (particolarmente radicato nel nostro paese) che la scienza proponga una visione del mondo "disumanizzante" e che la ricerca sul senso della vita non solo non possa beneficiare da essa, ma che ne sia in qualche modo danneggiata. Parte di questo luogo comune è inoltre che solo le discipline umanistiche e le arti possano avere una voce in capitolo come fonti autorevoli per una riflessione significativa sul senso della vita.¹⁷ In una visione naturalizzata e pluralista della vita umana e dei suoi beni la scienza è una fonte primaria di conoscenza del mondo e un motore di trasformazione delle nostre vite, anche nella più personale attività di interrogazione e di ricerca del loro senso.

¹⁶ È questo un tema che si trova articolato nella cosiddetta *Deep ecology*, seppure sostenuto da un apparato teorico non esente da critiche (critiche che qui tuttavia non si possono neppure sommariamente esporre). Sulla *Deep ecology* si veda: A. Næss, *Introduzione all'ecologia*, ETS, Pisa, 2015.

¹⁷ A titolo di esempio si può qui portare una citazione di quello che è considerato uno dei padri nobili della cultura contemporanea del nostro paese. Così scrive Benedetto Croce della ricostruzione evolucionistica delle origini dell'umanità: "Non solo non vivifica l'intelletto, ma mortifica l'animo, il quale alla storia chiede la nobile visione delle lotte umane e nuovo alimento all'entusiasmo morale, e riceve invece l'immagine di fantastiche origini animalesche e meccaniche dell'umanità e con essa un senso di sconforto e di depressione e quasi di vergogna a trovarci noi discendenti da quegli antenati e sostanzialmente loro simili, nonostante le illusioni e le ipocrisie della civiltà, brutali come loro" (B. Croce, "La natura come storia senza storia da noi scritta", *La critica*, 1939, XXXVII, p. 146).

I LIMITI DI UNA CONCEZIONE SOGGETTIVISTA DEL SENSO DELLA VITA

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ABSTRACT

The paper draws attention to five main elements of the account offered in Lecaldano's *Sul senso della vita*: the subjectivity of a research concerning the meaning of life, its communicability, its sharp distinction from morality, its rejection of any religious perspective, and its being tied to the development of certain character traits, rather than to the adoption of any intellectual consideration or theory. It then offers some suggestions on how each of these points may be partly amended or criticized.

KEYWORDS

Objectivism, perfectionism, morality, religiousness.

La riflessione di Eugenio Lecaldano sul senso della vita si colloca all'interno di alcuni vincoli e condizioni che egli enuncia ripetutamente e in modo assai chiaro; nel loro insieme, queste indicazioni delineano il punto di vista da cui, secondo l'autore, ci si deve collocare per impostare correttamente il problema e trovare una soluzione. Problema che, come Lecaldano precisa subito, concerne il senso delle vite che ciascuno di noi individualmente conduce, non invece il senso della vita umana in generale; alla luce della teoria evoluzionista, infatti, quest'ultima ricerca non può che approdare alla conclusione che la vita umana nel suo complesso non ha un senso o uno scopo definito, ma è piuttosto il frutto della pura causalità e di una radicale contingenza. Una volta delimitata in questo modo, la ricerca di Lecaldano si caratterizza per cinque fondamentali aspetti.

In primo luogo, Lecaldano adotta un punto di vista soggettivo o 'interno', ossia una prospettiva che ritiene condizione necessaria per la

definizione del senso di una vita individuale il fatto che tale senso appaia e venga riconosciuto da colui che di tale vita è il soggetto. In quest'ottica, va rifiutata ogni pretesa di oggettività, la quale, comportando “risposte prive di connotazioni particolari a domande che [...] non possono che riguardare vite umane circoscritte e determinate”, è “destinata ad autoconfutarsi”¹. La ricerca di Lecaldano si svolge perciò “in un orizzonte particolaristico, personalistico e soggettivo” (p. 53), in cui le affermazioni sul significato e/o il valore oggettivo di una vita non hanno cittadinanza e risulta sostanzialmente scorretto volersi pronunciare sul significato delle vite altrui, in particolare se esse si sviluppano in condizioni per noi difficilmente immaginabili.

In secondo luogo, Lecaldano insiste sul carattere essenzialmente comunicabile del significato della vita umana: pur rifiutando la tesi che individua dei tratti essenziali della vita umana e sostiene che il senso della vita consiste nell'adeguare a essi le nostre esistenze individuali, Lecaldano afferma però che il significato che ciascuno dà alla propria vita deve poter comunicare agli altri un discorso sensato, a prescindere dal fatto che essi lo condividano oppure no. Respinge, cioè, da un lato, lo scetticismo di coloro che, presupponendo concezioni non difendibili del significato, hanno respinto la domanda sul senso della vita come priva di significato, dall'altro il nichilismo di chi vi ha risposto dichiarando la completa assurdità del nostro passaggio su questa terra. Lecaldano sostiene invece non solo che la domanda sul senso della vita sia di per sé significativa, ma anche che sono intrinseche alle risposte che ciascuno di noi vi fornisce l'esigenza che altri ne riconoscano la rilevanza, l'influenza che le nostre concezioni subiscono dalla stima o dalla disapprovazione altrui e addirittura la “pretesa che anche gli altri apprezzino e lodino ciò che sta dando un senso alla nostra vita” (p. 130).

Una terza caratterizzazione del discorso svolto nel libro è la netta distinzione tra la ricerca sul senso della vita e altri due ambiti di ricerca, pure appartenenti alla filosofia morale, intesa in un'accezione ampia: da una parte, la riflessione morale vera e propria, ossia l'indagine normativa sulle virtù, i valori e i principi dell'agire corretto, dall'altra la riflessione su ciò che contribuisce al benessere della vita umana o che la rende felice. Per quanto concerne il primo punto, Lecaldano osserva che, sebbene vi sia una lunga tradizione che tende a considerare sensata solo una vita che

¹ E. Lecaldano, *Sul senso della vita*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2016, p. 55. Tutte le altre citazioni nel testo si riferiscono a questo volume.

realizza valori morali, e in particolare quelli dell'altruismo e della benevolenza, vivere una vita moralmente apprezzabile non è affatto l'unica strada per avere una vita sensata. La distinzione tra i due ambiti è evidente dalla considerazione per cui, mentre nel caso della morale assume un ruolo decisivo l'adozione di un punto di vista universale, nel caso del senso della vita conta soprattutto la biografia individuale e una prospettiva soggettiva è ineliminabile. Inoltre, come ha mostrato Bernard Williams², vite come quella di Paul Gauguin sono senza dubbio sensate e piene di valore, sebbene non possano esser dette esemplari dal punto di vista del loro rispetto dei valori morali. Per quanto riguarda invece la differenza rispetto alla ricerca della felicità, Lecaldano osserva giustamente che non c'è alcuna contraddizione nel sostenere che una certa vita sia stata perfettamente sensata, benché del tutto infelice; il significato assunto da un'esistenza, infatti, non si identifica con la riuscita dei progetti intrapresi e, anzi, una vita che racchiude il fallimento di progetti nobili o di grande valore può essere molto più significativa di una in cui si realizzano scopi banali o privi di valore.

Il quarto punto su cui Lecaldano ritorna con insistenza, e che costituisce un elemento particolarmente qualificante del suo approccio al problema, consiste nel netto rifiuto di ogni prospettiva di ordine teologico o religioso. Non solo egli intende mostrare che la ricerca del significato della vita possa approdare a conclusioni positive nel quadro di un orizzonte agnostico o francamente ateistico; in più punti, egli sembra voler sostenere altresì che è solo rimuovendo dall'orizzonte ogni credenza religiosa che si può affrontare in modo fertile il problema. Infatti, le risposte che utilizzano argomentazioni teologiche e religiose si basano su "narrazioni favolistiche" (p. 32) "minate o addirittura smentite dalla ricerca scientifica ed empirica" (p. 100), "indirizzano [...] lungo vie di ricerca che possiamo ritenere ormai chiuse" (p. 31) e si caratterizzano per "vaghezza, confusione e superamento di qualsiasi distinzione logica tra essere e dover essere" (p. 34). Inoltre, le concezioni religiose esitano inevitabilmente nella soluzione "alienante" di collocare nella trascendenza la risposta al senso della vita, oltre a presentare caratteristiche di assolutezza ed eternità che "non possono che rendere frustrante l'esistenza di coloro che credono in esse" (p. 36). Infine, è proprio al teismo, oltre che al razionalismo, che si devono imputare lo scetticismo e il nichilismo circa

² B. Williams, *Sorte morale*, in Id., *Sorte morale*, Milano, Il Saggiatore, 1987, pp. 33-58.

il senso della vita: dove si deve intendere che il teismo avrebbe squalificato radicalmente l'al di qua con la promessa di un significato proiettato nell'al di là, promessa che, una volta rivelatasi fallace, produce la disperazione circa il senso della vita.

L'ultima caratteristica del discorso di Lecaldano può essere individuata nel fatto di legare strettamente il senso della vita allo sviluppo di un carattere individuale, piuttosto che a specifiche azioni e realizzazioni. Una concezione del senso della vita, in altri termini, non si basa su considerazioni intellettuali complesse, o sullo sviluppo di teorie sistematiche e coerenti dell'identità personale, ma si sviluppa prevalentemente sul piano dei sentimenti e delle passioni. Essa fa leva su esperienze comuni agli esseri umani, come l'immaginazione e la capacità di partecipare alle emozioni altrui, per elaborare punti di vista generali dai quali valutare l'apprezzabilità dei tratti di carattere che, in maniera sempre precaria e rivedibile, conferiscono una qualche unità narrativa alla nostra vita, così da configurarla, per lo più retrospettivamente, come dotata di un senso stabile e comunicabile.

Una concezione soggettiva ma comunicabile, distinta da una prospettiva morale e aliena da ogni dimensione religiosa, concentrata invece sui sentimenti e passioni che rivelano gli investimenti personali che strutturano la nostra esistenza, investimenti che sono suscettibili di una considerazione simpatetica da parte di spettatori imparziali e simpatetici: questa, in estrema sintesi, l'idea che Lecaldano propone di una ricerca sul senso della vita. Rispetto ai diversi punti elencati, cerco ora di svolgere alcune osservazioni critiche.

Incominciando dall'ultimo punto, due aspetti delle osservazioni svolte da Lecaldano sono indubbiamente convincenti. Il primo riguarda l'importanza dei sentimenti e delle emozioni nella concezione di ciò che dà senso alle nostre vite. Non è necessario aderire alla prospettiva sentimentalista e humana difesa dall'autore per riconoscere che, quand'anche si professi l'adesione a qualche valore oggettivo, o si ponga particolare enfasi sull'unità e la coerenza razionale del proprio percorso di vita, non si potrà non annettere un ruolo decisivo alle dimensioni emotive. Ciò che dà senso alla nostra vita è necessariamente qualcosa che muove le nostre emozioni e che ci motiva a perseguire certi progetti o a sviluppare certi tratti di carattere. La convinzione razionale che la benevolenza, o la creazione artistica, o perfino il sapere intellettuale hanno un valore difficilmente può portarci ad agire in certi modi se non opera sulla nostra sfera sentimentale ed emotiva, attivando comportamenti che

contribuiscono a dare senso alle nostre vite. Questa considerazione ha peraltro una forza del tutto particolare in questo contesto, rispetto all'ambito strettamente morale: infatti, mentre in quest'ultimo è per lo meno ipotizzabile una concezione pienamente razionalista che ricava la motivazione a un comportamento corretto dalla pura credenza intellettuale su ciò che è giusto o doveroso fare, è difficile pensare che l'adesione a un certo valore oggettivo renda una vita sensata se non si lega a un'adesione sentimentale, a una passione che ci porta a investire tempo ed energie per realizzarlo.

Il secondo elemento convincente, nella posizione di Lecaldano, riguarda la critica che egli rivolge alle concezioni "platoniche"³ che legano il riconoscimento del valore della vita alla manifestazione di una piena coerenza tra le diverse parti della nostra esperienza e allo sviluppo coerente e sistematico di un progetto o di un piano di vita generale. In effetti, è dubbio che, dal punto di vista pratico, la maggior parte delle persone proceda a organizzare la propria vita nei modi immaginati dai filosofi; più spesso, le nostre vite procedono in maniera frammentaria e il significato complessivo da esse espresso appare in maniera molto meno sistematica e coerente di quanto non sia presupposto da questi approcci. Ed è vero altresì, come sottolinea Lecaldano, che la pratica riflessiva di interrogarsi sul senso della propria vita è spesso implicita e talvolta assente nelle vite ordinarie delle persone, e che, quando questa domanda emerge effettivamente, le risposte possiedono spesso un carattere induttivo e a posteriori.

Al tempo stesso, però, si può osservare che, se dal piano dell'esperienza individuale ci spostiamo verso quello della teorizzazione filosofica, sia la richiesta di una certa unità e coerenza, sia la concentrazione sul perfezionamento individuale e il raggiungimento di obiettivi di valore sembrano presentare un'indubbia pertinenza nel definire una vita dotata di significato. Senza escludere, cioè, che di fatto molte vite umane possano avere un significato pur senza manifestare, se non in misura minima, queste caratteristiche, si può ritenere che esse definiscano una sorta di ideale cui le vite reali delle persone possono cercare, almeno a tratti, di avvicinarsi. La principale obiezione che Lecaldano rivolge a queste

³ Il riferimento al platonico è dovuto alla discussione dei caratteri filosofici svolta da Hume in quattro dei *Saggi morali, politici e letterari* (Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1987), cui qui Lecaldano fa riferimento. Come esempio di un approccio platonico contemporaneo, Lecaldano discute in particolare il lavoro di R. Nozick, *Spiegazioni filosofiche*, Milano, Il Saggiatore, 1987.

concezioni riguarda la loro “vocazione elitaria” e la “tendenza a giudicare ogni biografia in base a un’unica scala di valori” (p. 107). Che vi siano concezioni che manifestano queste tendenze è indubbio; che però tali tendenze siano necessariamente associate ad esse è molto più discutibile. È ben possibile, invece, che anche concezioni di tipo platonico – che perciò attribuiscono un certo valore alla coerenza unitaria e ricercano la realizzazione di valori oggettivi – coltivino il senso della pluralità degli scopi e dei valori che una vita significativa può perseguire e realizzare; ed è assai probabile che, almeno nelle versioni contemporanee, esse propongano scopi accessibili a chiunque e per nulla “elitari”. L’adesione a una concezione “perfezionista”, in altri termini, non pone necessariamente a rischio la valorizzazione di ciò che vi è di peculiarmente individuale e soggettivo nella vita di ciascun individuo ordinario, sia perché concezioni di questo genere non sono legate a tratti eroici, straordinari o sublimi, sia perché, dato un certo valore che si presume oggettivo, infiniti possono essere i modi in cui soggettivamente aderirvi ed esprimerlo nella propria esistenza. È chiaro, però, che l’avversione di Lecaldano per questo tipo di approccio si fonda soprattutto sul suo netto rifiuto di ogni concezione oggettivista e sull’adesione a una prospettiva soggettivista e particolarista; il che ci conduce al primo punto che abbiamo esaminato, su cui conviene soffermarci più ampiamente.

La difesa di una tesi soggettivista sul senso della vita è l’aspetto qualificante della proposta di Lecaldano. Non esiste alcun senso oggettivo, ma il senso deve essere individuato da ciascuno sulla base delle proprie passioni e dei propri investimenti; pertanto, nessuno può pretendere di dirci quale sia il senso della nostra vita, attribuendo a essa un significato che noi non riconosciamo e, per converso, non possiamo pronunciarci autorevolmente sul senso o il non senso della vita altrui. L’idea centrale di Lecaldano è appunto quella di caratterizzare il soggettivismo sul senso della vita come una posizione genuinamente alternativa allo scetticismo e al nichilismo. Tuttavia, ci dobbiamo chiedere: si può coerentemente difendere una simile posizione? Cerco qui di suggerire alcuni argomenti per rispondere negativamente a tale domanda.

Possiamo prendere le mosse da una serie di affermazioni dello stesso autore, che, in maniera implicita, e a tratti anche esplicita, concedono in realtà molto alla posizione oggettivista. Come si è detto, Lecaldano insiste sulla comunicabilità e condivisibilità della nostra concezione del senso della nostra vita; è vitale, per noi, che altri possano apprezzare il nostro percorso e il loro giudizio influenza in maniera decisiva la nostra

percezione di noi stessi. Questo processo di apprezzamento e condivisione da parte di altri conduce Lecaldano all'immagine dello spettatore imparziale, che indica quella sorta di sdoppiamento della personalità mediante il quale assumiamo una distanza critica dal nostro carattere, per operarne una valutazione. Questo processo conduce alla nozione di amabilità: all'idea, cioè, che nel carattere e nelle azioni vi sia qualcosa che è degno di essere amato e lodato, e che va distinto nettamente da ciò che di fatto è amato e lodato⁴. Questo scarto tra la dimensione descrittiva e quella normativa e deontica introduce una dimensione di oggettività, ossia di un'apprezzabilità che sussiste anche in mancanza di effettivi atti di apprezzamento. Lecaldano stesso riconosce l'esistenza di una pretesa di oggettività, laddove afferma che alle attività con cui proviamo a dare un senso alla nostra vita attribuiamo necessariamente un valore, un valore che vogliamo che anche gli altri apprezzino. È vero che si affretta a dichiarare la sua distanza "da una teoria forte che interpreta in termini realistici questo requisito dell'oggettività" (p. 130); e, come si è già richiamato, sostiene addirittura che la pretesa sia "filosoficamente impegnativa" e "destinata ad autoconfutarsi" (p. 55). Tuttavia, è chiaro che sussiste una tensione tra quest'ultima affermazione *tranchante* e il tentativo successivamente intrapreso di accogliere comunque la pretesa di oggettività, riconducendola nell'ambito della posizione soggettivista. In ogni caso, occorre affrontare due domande centrali: è vero che la vita di un essere umano non possa essere dotata di significato, per via dei valori che esprime, anche se tale significato non appare soggettivamente a chi la vive? Ed è vero che il fatto di apparire significativa a colui che la vive costituisce una condizione sufficiente perché una vita lo sia effettivamente?

Una posizione soggettivista dovrebbe rispondere affermativamente a entrambe le domande. Tuttavia, per quanto riguarda la seconda, una risposta negativa sembra essere suggerita dallo stesso Lecaldano, il quale sembra consentire con Susan Wolf⁵, quando dichiara che una vita impegnata in occupazioni futili – come giocare ai videogiochi – non può essere una vita sensata, anche se può godere di un certo benessere soggettivo. Inoltre, nel delineare la sua proposta positiva, Lecaldano dichiara che il nucleo portante di un carattere tale da conferire senso alla

⁴ Si veda in proposito A. Smith, *Teoria dei sentimenti morali*, Milano, Rizzoli, 1995, pp. 258-290.

⁵ S. Wolf, *Meaning in Life and Why It Matters*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2010.

vita del suo possessore “sarà un impegno responsabile sia a ridurre la quantità di sofferenze dell’umanità in generale, sia ad accrescerne le libertà, il benessere e la cultura” (p. 125). Da queste affermazioni sembra di poter evincere, contro le dichiarazioni dello stesso autore, che l’impegno ad alleviare le sofferenze e ad accrescere libertà, benessere e cultura possiede un valore *oggettivo*: una vita vissuta in base a un carattere ispirato da questi valori è una vita significativa, sia che altri effettivamente lo riconoscano sia che ciò, per qualche ragione contingente, non avvenga. Non basta, infatti, un qualsiasi scopo, come ad esempio quello di giocare ai videogiochi, a rendere sensata una vita, ma è solo l’impegnarla in attività che possiedono un valore oggettivo a dotarla di un senso che può essere intersoggettivamente riconoscibile. Infatti, dice ancora Lecaldano, una certa “profondità e serietà” degli impegni e degli scopi che ci preoccupiamo di raggiungere sono necessarie affinché la propria vita abbia un senso.

A queste condizioni, che sembrano chiaramente portare verso una forma di oggettivismo, Lecaldano aggiunge però il requisito di una qualche “consapevolezza o trasparenza” del significato per la persona che valuta la propria vita. Questo ci porta alla prima domanda, quella relativa all’essere il riconoscimento soggettivo una condizione necessaria per il senso della vita; l’approccio soggettivista è impegnato a sostenere che la vita di una persona il cui carattere presenta le caratteristiche che abbiamo appena richiamato, ma che non ritiene la propria vita dotata di significato, non possieda in realtà una vita significativa. Questa conclusione è molto dubbia. Immaginiamo che un grande artista, come van Gogh, abbia passato la propria vita tra mille difficoltà, guadagnandosi da vivere con fatica e cercando senza alcun successo di farsi valere nel mondo dell’arte. A fronte di difficoltà materiali, insuccessi e incomprensioni, questi potrebbe forse arrivare al termine della propria esistenza dichiarando l’insensatezza della propria vita. Potremmo ritenere giustificato tale giudizio? Credo che dovremmo concludere che, nella misura in cui, attraverso la propria arte, quest’uomo ha contribuito in maniera decisiva ad accrescere la cultura umana, influenzando generazioni di successivi artisti e regalando al pubblico per molti anni a venire esperienze estetiche di altissimo valore, egli ha vissuto una vita significativa. Il valore artistico e umano che in essa si è espresso la rende indubbiamente tale; è un significato che le persone della sua epoca non hanno potuto o saputo comprendere, ma che appare pienamente leggibile ad altri esseri umani vissuti successivamente. È, dolorosamente, anche un significato di cui, per

ragioni contingenti, quello stesso artista non ha potuto essere consapevole, in quanto il senso e il valore dell'esperienza che la sua arte cercava di esprimere erano offuscati dalle difficoltà e dalle incomprensioni. Il fatto che l'individuo non ne abbia avuto consapevolezza toglie, al fatto che quella vita avesse un significato, il suo influsso positivo, in termini di benessere individuale, che esso generalmente possiede per il soggetto di quella vita; non toglie, però, che quella vita abbia avuto un significato riconoscibile e importante per altri individui.

Il timore di Lecaldano è che un approccio oggettivista alla questione conduca al venir meno della sensibilità per gli aspetti peculiarmente individuali delle vite umane, uniformandole in un unico modello, definito dal riferimento a una lista predefinita di valori; perciò, egli respinge come impertinente l'obiettivo di "fornire una lista di attività o di contenuti che possano dare un senso alla vita" (p. 125), obiettivo che, invece, sarebbe proprio delle concezioni oggettiviste. È davvero poco probabile, però, che l'affermazione del valore oggettivo di scopi così ampi e comprensivi, come quelli indicati dallo stesso Lecaldano quando parla di alleviamento delle sofferenze umane e di coltivazione della libertà e della cultura, possa limitare lo spazio di libertà individuale o mortificare la ricerca di significato da parte di chi sia portatore di concezioni personali, eventualmente difformi da quelle della maggioranza. Lo stesso Mill, cui Lecaldano si richiama volentieri, insistendo sul ruolo decisivo rivestito dalla libertà di "perseguire il proprio progetto di miglioramento e perfezionamento" (p. 120), insiste sul valore oggettivo di quegli scopi, come la coltivazione della poesia, che mettono in campo le nostre facoltà intellettuali, scopi che perciò devono essere preferiti rispetto a piaceri più semplici, come il gioco delle pulci di cui parla Bentham. I giudici competenti cui si richiama Mill preferiscono tali occupazioni perché sono consapevoli del loro maggior valore; è lasciando a ciascuno la libertà di sviluppare le proprie capacità intellettuali, anche attraverso "esperimenti di vita" che possono apparire originali o discutibili alla maggioranza, che si promuove il progresso generale della vita umana⁶. La vita degli individui che sviluppano liberamente le proprie capacità non solo assume

⁶ Il paragone tra poesia e gioco delle pulci si trova in J. Bentham, *The Rationale of Reward*, 1825. La superiorità degli scopi intellettuali e la menzione dei giudici competenti si trovano nel II capitolo del saggio *Utilitarianism* (1861), mentre il rapporto tra esperimenti di vita e progresso generale della specie è delineato nel terzo capitolo del saggio *On Liberty* (1859); vedi J. S. Mill, *La libertà, L'utilitarismo, L'asservimento delle donne*, Milano, Rizzoli, 1998.

un significato per loro, ma indica possibili strade per altri e perciò acquisisce agli occhi di Mill un valore per l'intera specie umana, contribuendo alla sua felicità e alla riduzione delle sue sofferenze. L'affermazione del valore oggettivo delle occupazioni e degli scopi che coinvolgono le facoltà superiori è perciò perfettamente compatibile con il ruolo della soggettività e della possibilità di sperimentare idee e valori originali.

Concludo con qualche breve osservazione sui due punti non ancora toccati, ossia il rapporto tra la questione del senso della vita e la morale e il suo rapporto con la dimensione religiosa. Per quanto riguarda il primo punto, le osservazioni di Lecaldano sono senz'altro pertinenti: la dimensione morale chiama in causa le nozioni di universalità e imparzialità con molta maggiore forza di quanto non accada per la questione del senso della vita e vi sono vite indubbiamente significative che appaiono discutibili dal punto di vista morale. È vero, dunque, che vivere una vita morale non è l'unico modo per rendere significativa la propria esistenza. Alle osservazioni di Lecaldano aggiungerei solo due piccole chiose. In primo luogo, si può aggiungere che vivere una vita morale, pur non essendo necessario per avere una vita felice, costituisce tuttavia il modo migliore per avere una vita significativa, o quello che con maggiore facilità consente di realizzare questo fine. Da un lato, infatti, coltivare un ideale morale significa avere uno o più scopi che consideriamo importanti, in un senso profondo del termine, e questo tende a generare un forte investimento dei nostri sentimenti e delle nostre capacità razionali, consentendo alle nostre vite di avere una direzione e un significato; d'altro canto, la maggior parte degli obiettivi morali che gli esseri umani si pongono li porta a intrecciare relazioni significative con altri, a preoccuparsi in qualche modo di loro e il creare legami stabili con i nostri simili, come riconosce l'autore, è uno dei fattori principali che conferiscono senso alle nostre vite. Anche Lecaldano, d'altronde, condivide l'idea che la salvaguardia dei valori morali sia per lo meno una condizione necessaria per condurre una vita dotata di senso ed esclude che una condotta che "metta completamente da parte le esigenze dell'etica" (p. 56), come ad esempio la vita dei grandi criminali della storia, possa essere riconosciuta come significativa. Ciò che aggiungerei è il fatto che un impegno sincero nei confronti dei valori morali è in genere una condizione anche sufficiente ai fini di una vita significativa.

Una seconda chiosa su questo punto consiste nell'osservare che, se è vero che le vite significative sono quelle che realizzano valori oggettivi,

ossia che contribuiscono in qualche modo al progresso materiale o spirituale dell'umanità, allora è anche vero che la vita di Gauguin, pur essendo per alcuni aspetti censurabile dal punto di vista morale, costituisce indirettamente un contributo importante agli scopi morali dell'umanità. Tra questi, vi è infatti la coltivazione di se stessi, o dell'umanità che è in noi; anzi, va senza dubbio rilevato il limite delle prospettive radicalmente imparzialiste e totalmente agente-neutrali, come certe forme di utilitarismo, nella misura in cui non contemplanò, nella loro concezione della vita morale, l'esistenza di uno spazio per la coltivazione dei propri progetti e dei propri interessi⁷.

L'ultimo punto che vorrei sottolineare riguarda il rapporto tra senso della vita e dimensione religiosa. A questo proposito, mi pare che Lecaldano venga trascinato dalle indubbie ragioni che possiede verso una posizione estrema che risulta invece ingiustificata. Credo cioè che Lecaldano abbia pienamente ragione quando dichiara di poter dimostrare "come una risposta pienamente adeguata alla ricerca di senso possa essere sviluppata credendo esclusivamente nell'esistenza naturale degli esseri umani" (p. 32), o quando reagisce criticamente alle tesi che sostengono la necessità di una credenza religiosa per trovare risposte alla domanda sul senso della vita. La piena legittimità dell'obiettivo di "mostrare fin dove è possibile arrivare nella costruzione di una vita dotata di senso senza chiamare in causa né Dio né l'immortalità" (p. 40) non giustifica, però, le affermazioni sopra riportate secondo cui solo adottare una concezione atea consentirebbe di fornire delle risposte valide alla domanda di senso. Quando Lecaldano cerca di mostrare che le concezioni religiose del senso della vita hanno necessariamente conseguenze alienanti per chi le adotta, o di legarle alla caduta nello scetticismo e nel nichilismo, sembra entrare in contraddizione con i suoi stessi presupposti. Il suo dichiarato soggettivismo, infatti, dovrebbe portarlo a sospendere il giudizio su concezioni della vita che non condivide ma che vengono condivise da moltissime altre persone e vengono affermate con piena consapevolezza da chi le fa proprie. Pensare che la ricerca scientifica possa dimostrare la falsità della religione, o addirittura condurre alla sparizione del fenomeno religioso, è una pretesa ricorrente di filosofi e scienziati, più volte smentita

⁷ Sull'esistenza di questa duplicità di ordini – agente-neutrale e agente-relativo – all'interno della morale, ha notoriamente insistito T. Nagel, *Uno sguardo da nessun luogo*, Milano, Il Saggiatore, 1986.

dai fatti⁸. Ma soprattutto, la critica al carattere alienante e vacuo delle risposte basate sul sentimento religioso si basa su una concezione obsoleta di che cosa sia la fede religiosa. Chi crede, in particolare nelle religioni storiche e rivelate, non compie un irrazionale atto di rinuncia alla vita su questa terra, alle sue gioie e alle sue soddisfazioni in nome di una felicità eterna, ma piuttosto si affida alla rivelazione di Dio individuandovi la ragione ultima – e, a suo giudizio, più profonda – per amare questo mondo e le sue creature e trovare in questo un senso per la propria vita. Chi non condivide questa fede può senza dubbio fare altrettanto sulla base di ragioni diverse. Certamente il credente non è giustificato nel rivendicare il monopolio di una vita sensata e meritevole di essere vissuta; lo stesso, tuttavia, vale per il non credente.

⁸ Se ne possono leggere versioni molto aggiornate in D.C. Dennett, *Rompere l'incantesimo. La religione come fenomeno naturale*, Milano, Cortina, 2007 e R. Dawkins, *L'illusione di Dio. Le ragioni per non credere*, Milano, Mondadori, 2008.

CONTINUANDO A RIFLETTERE SUL SENSO DELLA VITA CON L'AIUTO DELLA DISCUSSIONE

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I answer the questions raised by the discussants of *E&P* concerning my book *Il senso della vita* (Bologna, Il Mulino, 2016). The questions and answers span many topics – such as the relations between morality, happiness and the meaning of life, my naturalist and sentimentalist metaethics, and so on and so forth.

KEYWORDS

Meaning of life, self, sentimentalism, morality, happiness, evolutionary theory, Hume, Butler, Mill, Williams, Darwin.

1. LA STRUTTURAZIONE DELLE RISPOSTE

In primo luogo ringrazio Riccardo Fanciullaci e Pierpaolo Marrone che come direttori di “*Etica&Politica/Ethics&Politics*” ospitano questa discussione. Ringrazio poi molto Stefano Bacin (*La ricerca di un senso della vita, la prospettiva morale e i limiti di una concezione sentimentalista*), Caterina Botti (*Il senso della vita , senza Dio , ma con gli altri*), Lorenzo Greco (*Un'esile significanza: Eugenio Lecaldano sul senso della vita*) Pierpaolo Marrone (*Il senso della vita: la risposta è dentro di te, ma potrebbe essere quella sbagliata*), Gianfranco Pellegrino (*Senso della vita e moralità: le relazioni pericolose*), Simone Pollo (*Il senso della vita in un mondo darwiniano*), Massimo Reichlin (*Eugenio Lecaldano sul senso della vita*). Tutti questi interventi riescono a rendere conto in modo preciso – manifestando una molto apprezzabile virtù dell'accoglienza e tolleranza teorica – del discorso da me fatto nel libro, sollevando una serie di rilievi molto significativi ed esprimendo anche alcuni apprezzamenti che mi sono molto graditi .

Mi limito qui di seguito a rispondere ai rilievi critici, seguendo l'ordine alfabetico degli interventi. Come si vedrà in un certo numero di casi in più testi vengono formulate obiezioni che convergono su di una stessa tematica: per evitare ripetizioni cerco di assemblare il mio tentativo di risposta in genere facendolo

seguire alla prima occasione in cui viene sollevata la questione. Non mi sembra però di essere riuscito a costruire un testo adeguato per quanto riguarda la sintesi, la semplificazione e i rimandi interni, ma ho preferito dare una risposta complessiva in tempi brevi piuttosto che prolungare per alcuni mesi una stesura più adeguata di quello che potrei dire. In fondo la mia risposta più significativa sarebbe quella che potrei dare ritornando in modo complessivo su tutta la riflessione sul senso della vita: la rilevanza degli scritti che si soffermano sulle mie pagine lo richiederebbe, ma non sono sicuro che le evenienze della vita me lo permetteranno. Comunque talvolta richiamo la risposta già data eventualmente integrandola.

Nelle mie risposte cercherò di evitare la mossa stilistica di invitare l'interlocutore a rileggere meglio quanto scritto nel mio libro: in primo luogo mi sembra che tutti gli interventi documentino la cura e attenzione di chi ha letto e non presentano travisamenti veramente sostanziali delle mie tesi; in secondo luogo chi scrive un libro ha la responsabilità anche del modo in cui espone le sue idee e quindi laddove un passo non è chiaro (come risulta evidente nel caso in cui il passo suscita rilievi che non colgono lo 'spirito' del testo) egli deve fornire comunque ulteriori spiegazioni. Piuttosto in alcuni pochi casi – dato che la discussione filosofica riguarda tesi teoriche, argomenti a loro sostegno e spiegazioni delle esperienze a cui queste tesi si richiamano – forse si è autorizzati nel caso di alcune obiezioni a un rinvio ad altri testi in cui chi teorizza ha elaborato più compiutamente la presentazione delle parti in discussione. Naturalmente risposte del genere manifestano una qualche forma di arroganza e non sempre l'autore è consapevole di quanto il suo contributo teorico in realtà si vada trasformando e aggiustando. Alcune lacune nel testo di *Sul senso della vita* sono per me comprensibili in quanto ero convinto di riaffrontare questioni che mi sembrava di avere già sufficientemente sviluppato in precedenti scritti. In effetti *Sul senso della vita* fa parte di una elaborazione teorica che ho avviato negli ultimi dieci anni, sempre non perdendo di vista la lezione di classici della filosofia come D.Hume, A.Smith e J.S.Mill, dopo avere esaurito il tentativo di seguire nelle sue diverse articolazioni lo sviluppo recente della bioetica e delle altre etiche applicate. A partire da *Etica senza Dio* (2005) il mio progetto è stato quello di articolare una concezione naturalistica di tipo più generale non solo dell'etica, ma anche delle dimensioni affettive degli esseri umani e delle varie pratiche con cui essi gestiscono le dimensioni di valore che hanno creato nella loro cultura. In questo contesto possono essere collocati i volumi *Prima lezione di filosofia morale* (2010), *Simpatia* (2013), *Senza Dio* (2015) e *Sul senso della vita* (2016). Questa elaborazione da una parte ha cercato di delineare alcune ipotesi esplicative sulla genesi e il funzionamento delle diverse pratiche di volta in volta tematizzate; dall'altra ha mostrato come queste impostazioni naturalistiche erano in grado di rendere conto in modo del tutto autonomo e soddisfacente di queste pratiche; infine non ha mancato di muoversi in una dimensione critica e normativa sia mostrando che le

accuse di insufficienza ad esse erano del tutto mal riposte sia elaborando schemi di soluzioni dei problemi interni alle varie pratiche che si raccomandavano a lettrici e lettori come quelle da preferire. Una elaborazione teorica almeno nelle intenzioni di chi l'ha portata avanti con una qualche continuità e cumulatività e che forse può spiegare alcune omissioni di analisi di dettaglio e argomentative nel lavoro più recente da cui muoviamo. Riconosco però che questo ultimo lavoro avrebbe potuto guadagnare in chiarezza per lettrici e lettori (o almeno così spero) se ci fosse stato qualche capoverso in più rivolto ad avvertire sul modo in cui si passava dal piano meta, ovvero ricostruttivo e esplicativo della pratica di una ricerca del senso della vita (un piano prevalente nei primi due capitoli), al piano critico e normativo (prevalente nel terzo capitolo). Alcune precisazioni a questo proposito sono avanzate in queste risposte, così come in esse si richiamano alcune tesi da me in precedenza elaborate sul come si possono giustificare – in una dimensione di peculiare oggettività consona all'espressivismo meta-etico – le pratiche che hanno a che fare con valori e su come debbano essere intrecciate in queste pratiche le analisi su ciò che è con quelle su ciò che deve essere.

2. SUPPLIRE AI LIMITI DEL SENTIMENTALISMO CON UNA VIA OGGETTIVISTICA DI RICERCA DEL SENSO DELLA VITA CENTRATA SUL PERFEZIONAMENTO DI SÉ ?

Bacin formula una serie di significative obiezioni che muovono – o almeno così credo o mi sembra – dal suo diverso modo di collocare l'analisi filosofica, che seguendo le linee proprie del kantismo trova uno spazio per una dimensione apriori e trascendentale. Da questa prospettiva derivano le sue obiezioni e rilievi “sullo statuto fenomenologico della domanda sul senso della vita individuale”, “sul suo rapporto con istanze morali” e sui pregi e limiti di un'interpretazione di tale domanda in chiave sentimentalistica”. Sul piano dello statuto fenomenologico Bacin solleva l'obiezione che la mia prospettiva individuale e biografica non riuscirebbe a “mettere in grande risalto la diversità tra due angolazioni da cui muove la pratica dell'indagare sul senso della vita”, ovvero che “tale pratica può avere una funzione prospettiva, rivolta al futuro, e una funzione retrospettiva rivolta verso il passato”. In fondo a queste due angolazioni vi sarebbe una più ampia diversità fenomenologica: “se da un lato l'interrogarsi sul senso della propria vita avrebbe un ruolo motivazionale, dall'altro si tratterebbe invece della valutazione *ex post* di tale profilo, che può dare esiti anche molto diversi dalla riflessione che guarda al futuro”. In particolare secondo Bacin la pratica rivolta al passato non potrebbe non tenere conto “degli esiti delle nostre azioni” e dunque questa riflessione non potrebbe escludere la rilevanza di una “*achievementist view*”, secondo la quale solo la soddisfazione dei progetti potrebbe dare un senso alla vita.

Mentre nella mia teorizzazione questo vincolo del successo dei progetti è del tutto sottodimensionato, e questa è una ricaduta di un eccessivo collegamento della ricerca sul senso della vita con il futuro. Nel rispondere in primo luogo si può insistere che una valutazione sul senso della vita alla luce della prospettiva da me elaborata si realizza sempre nel presente (l'unica dimensione reale della vita psichica) e non già come un giudizio intellettuale, ma come un'emozione in cui si cristallizza la percezione del senso o del non senso che riguarda la nostra vita passata e contemporaneamente l'apertura progettuale verso il nostro continuare a vivere. Al livello del presente sono depotenziate le diversità tra prospettiva verso il passato e verso il futuro ed è messa in primo piano la connotazione sentimentale e passionale della pratica. Proprio quest'ultima componente è rivolta a salvaguardarne la forza motivazionale: per quanto riguarda la componente del collegamento con il successo nelle azioni mi sembra si debba ribadire che la pratica della ricerca di un senso nella vita non debba riguardare solo i vincenti. Il punto è che essa fuoriesce dall'ottica del vincere o perdere in qualche senso colta dal famoso dittico "quello che conta è partecipare". Ciò non toglie che il senso della vita coinvolge anche la dimensione della condotta (più in generale e non delle singole azioni data l'insistenza sul carattere della mia prospettiva), ma in questo quadro ciò che conterà non sarà la riuscita, i risultati, ma saranno il coraggio e l'impegno con cui si è cercata una qualche realizzazione.

Bacin tematizza anche la problematicità del mio modo di rendere conto della separazione tra criteri morali e criteri sul senso della vita: come vedremo anche altri interventi trattano criticamente questo punto. Bacin enuncia due problematicità: quella che egli identifica come "orientamento antimoralistico" e quello della plausibilità di tale separazione "in una prospettiva individuale". Effettivamente una delle mie preoccupazioni era di mettere al bando una chiusura di tipo moralistico della ricerca sul senso della vita. Uno degli errori categoriali principali da evitare è quello che fa coincidere la ricerca sul senso della vita con la messa a punto di un carattere e di una condotta moralmente apprezzabili. Ma tracciare questa distinzione non può essere giudicato un atteggiamento antimoralistico, a meno che non si veda dietro questo modo di procedere una motivazione per così dire latamente illuministica (che di certo c'è nella mia elaborazione) rivolta a contrastare così facendo coloro che richiamano sempre e comunque le regole morali, del tutto fuori luogo e ipocritamente, come un modo per estendere il loro potere. Bacin per altro ritiene "condivisibile" questo obiettivo di fondo in quanto "risponde all'esigenza di resistere a una distorsione dei criteri morali". Ma poi ritiene che il modo in cui viene da me tracciata la distinzione è inadeguato principalmente se si assume per il valore in gioco "la prospettiva dell'agente individuale". Se si adotta questa impostazione dovremmo riconoscere che non ci si apre di fronte "un'autentica differenza nella dimensione normativa" ma piuttosto "un aspetto di pluralismo interno all'ambito morale". Secondo Bacin

dalla prospettiva dell'agente individuale la ricerca sul senso della vita va riconosciuta piuttosto come "una dimensione intrasoggettiva della moralità, in cui ciò che ha rilevanza morale è anzitutto (anche se non esclusivamente) il rapporto del soggetto a se stesso, alle proprie capacità e al modo in cui esse vengono realizzate, anche nelle relazioni interpersonali". In questa ottica secondo Bacin la ricerca del senso della vita va vista come "un'area della morale incentrata sul perfezionamento di sé, a condizione che ciò non sia limitato sin dall'inizio da un modello astratto di persona". E Bacin sottoscrive esplicitamente una ricaduta normativa di questa impostazione scrivendo: "Il senso di una vita potrebbe essere visto nel perseguimento della propria perfezione personale", qualcosa che si può guadagnare "dall'interno dell'ambito morale". Questo secondo Bacin consentirebbe di impostare meglio di quanto faccia il mio libro le relazioni tra i due valori che ispirano la pratica morale e la pratica della ricerca sul senso della vita. Infatti nel mio libro si oscilla tra "separazione" e indipendenza. Invece per Bacin la separazione non sarebbe piena indipendenza in quanto "bisognerebbe definire una sorta di clausola di priorità delle richieste morali sulle altre istanze che orientano le nostre scelte". Diversamente un'indipendenza netta tra i due piani di riflessione è percorribile se si accetta di "distinguere tra la prospettiva interna che caratterizza la riflessione personale e la prospettiva esterna propria di un esame condotto dal punto di vista di terza persona". La diversità in fondo secondo Bacin sta nel fatto che "in una prospettiva esterna sono assenti elementi che invece connotano in modo assai profondo la riflessione personale: rimorso, rimpianto o rivendicazione delle proprie scelte passate". In questo quadro è nella "prospettiva esterna che diventa più plausibile che siano apprezzati anche elementi non passibili di approvazione morale". In una "valutazione dall'esterno si tratta piuttosto di individuare un paradigma in una riflessione che risponde a criteri di orientamento quasi narrativi, e che cerca anzitutto una coerenza di senso, a rischio di introdurla surrettiziamente". In realtà queste varie critiche sono solo una anticipazione della più sostanziosa presa di distanze di Bacin dalla posizione da me elaborata che si muove interamente all'interno del "sentimentalismo". Non funziona secondo Bacin "l'appello a una concezione emotivistica" come se mancassero "alternative plausibili". Il sentimentalismo che sorregge la mia ricostruzione della ricerca del senso della vita in realtà è espressione di "un antirazionalismo antropologico di fondo". Muovendo all'interno di questa prospettiva teorica si finisce con il trascurare la "presenza consistente nel dibattito contemporaneo di posizioni oggettivistiche del senso della vita che non hanno una matrice teologica". Un ulteriore problema analitico della impostazione soggettivistica e sentimentalistica da me elaborata è che muovendosi al suo interno non si può "riconoscere la possibilità che la vita di una persona sia pienamente dotata di senso seppure quella persona non ne sia soddisfatta, o non provi l'orgoglio a cui punta l'agente secondo

la ricostruzione emotivistica”. Si può da una parte rispondere che l’oggettivismo razionalistico è impraticabile sul piano epistemologico presupponendo un realismo intuizionistico e realistico che in quanto naturalisti ed empiristi non possiamo percorrere. Non si può fare altro in questa sede che richiamare alcuni recenti interventi che mettono in luce le difficoltà di questo tipo di posizione razionalista e realista, come ad esempio i contributi di Allan Gibbard, Simon Blackburn, Michael Smith e Mark Schroeder (nel recente volume curato da Peter Singer per discutere le tesi metaetiche di Derek Parfit in *On What Matter (Does Anything Really Matter ? Essays on Parfit on Objectivity*, a cura di P. Singer, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017: nel volume vi sono anche altri interventi sulla stessa linea). Naturalmente in questo confronto di linee teoriche nulla è definitivo, ma forse tenere conto dello sviluppo di questo confronto negli ultimi decenni (e Bacin da valido studioso di storia dell’etica ben lo conosce) può essere un aiuto per la comprensione del sentimentalismo e per una sua trattazione che non lo riduce all’emotivismo. Come vedremo anche rispondendo ad altri interventi problemi molto ampi si aprono percorrendo la soluzione normativa di un perfezionismo che non potrebbe che essere connotato moralmente data l’ottica prevalente di Bacin. Non si capisce infatti come muovendo dalla sua impostazione si potrebbe fare valere, da un punto di vista esterno, un criterio di valore secondario e sussidiario per le vite degli altri: in effetti potremmo solo tollerare che esse si dipanino nell’errore o nella insensatezza ad esempio non dicendo il vero quando, qualcuno che ha intenzione di ucciderlo, ci chiede se un innocente si è casualmente rifugiato o no nella nostra casa. Mentre la prospettiva decisamente soggettivistica e sentimentalistica è in grado di sorreggere una visione delle relazioni interpersonali non omologante o normalizzante, dando una portata del tutto secondaria e solo discorsiva e congetturale alle valutazioni sul senso delle vite degli altri. Ovviamente poi da un punto di vista sentimentalistico è incomprendibile che si possa sentire il rincrescimento, il rammarico ecc. che un altro potrebbe sentire provando a fare un bilancio sulla sensatezza della sua vita. Ne consegue che riconoscere il collegamento tra ricerca sul senso della vita ed emozioni del genere – ma anche quella dell’orgoglio – è una spinta a collocare questa ricerca solo nel contesto personale. La lettura riduzionista di Bacin in chiave emotivista del mio approccio sentimentalista credo non permetta di cogliere che ciò che il mio libro prova a fare è mostrare che nella ricerca umana di un senso della vita non è certo in gioco il progettare una condotta di cui si possa essere orgogliosi, ma piuttosto fare un esame della propria vita per riscontrare se in essa sono rintracciabili un insieme di elementi apprezzabili del proprio carattere (che di certo intendiamo fare valere progettando il nostro futuro): riscontro che fa poi sorgere uno specifico piacere di orgoglio per la capacità di avere cercato di dare un senso alla nostra vita. Una prospettiva sentimentalista del valore – diversamente da una emotivista – può fare propria la distinzione che troviamo in Hume tra ciò cui tende la nostra condotta e

il piacere che si guadagna ottenendolo. Una distinzione che Hume riprendeva da Joseph Butler per superare la concezione hobbesiana della motivazione umana in termini esclusivamente di edonismo egoistico. La nostra analisi della ricerca sul senso della vita in questa linea è elaborata ritenendo falsa una qualche forma di edonismo egoistico come struttura essenziale della motivazione umana e dunque permette di collocare in modo autonomo rispetto alla ricerca del piacere la passione che ci muove nel dare senso alla nostra vita, e di legare il piacere che da ciò si ricava non solo all'ottenimento, ma anche al semplice impegno nel cercare ciò che per noi è importante.

3. UNA GENEALOGIA DELLA SOGGETTIVITÀ CHE SI INTERROGA SUL SENSO DELLA VITA E LE SUE RICADUTE NORMATIVE

Con Caterina Botti ho avuto più volte un proficuo confronto di idee nel cercare di migliorare le mie tesi e la loro esposizione. Anche in questa occasione il suo contributo è di grande aiuto. Mi è d'aiuto l'accuratezza con cui sintetizza la mia prospettiva. Così come trovo illuminanti le spiegazioni che fornisce sul perché "una volta incamminatami sulla strada che (si) apre, la percorrerei in modo diverso". In particolare Botti suggerisce che si potrebbe prendere le mosse dalla "comune esperienza del cercare un senso alla propria vita in modo diverso e tentare di non assumerlo come un semplice dato di fatto da cui partire e invece provare a ricostruire quando e come, proprio la ricca interazione tra filosofia e esperienza ha portato a considerare o far sentire questa esperienza, così definita come una caratteristica umana: si potrebbe indagare ad esempio quand'è che (e forse anche perché) sono stati riconosciuti, proposti o inventati, a seconda dei casi, il concetto di individuo e quello della sua individuale ricerca di senso. Se ne potrebbe fare un'indagine genealogica". Mi sembra molto fertile questo suggerimento di Botti di mettere a tema la genesi delle nozioni da cui nel mio libro si dà l'impressione di muovere come se fossero un dato ovvio o acquisito. Proprio questa più ampia prospettiva genealogica permette a Botti di fare valere alcune prese di distanza dalla mia prospettiva. Importante è ad esempio il suggerimento di accogliere una diversa impostazione per cui chi cerca e narra in questa pratica non è solo l'io, ma occorre categorizzare questo io come una costruzione che riconosce "un ruolo maggiore anche per gli altri, per le narrazioni degli altri su di noi". I suggerimenti critici di Botti muovono tutti da una esigenza di approfondire la riflessione sulla soggettività che si presenta come centro motore (o attrice principale) della ricerca sul senso della vita. L'obiettivo è quello di allargare la concezione del soggetto, mettendo da parte "un io ancora troppo individualistico". Una concezione di soggettività che sappia riconoscere "il ruolo di ciò che ci muove al di sotto o al di sopra della nostra coscienza, dell'inconscio da una parte, dei condizionamenti

culturali dall'altra". Inoltre secondo Botti diversamente da quello che farei valere con il mio libro bisognerebbe dare maggiore spazio nella ricerca sul senso della vita all'importanza di "sentirsi parte di qualcosa di più grande di sé" e dunque dare maggiore rilevanza ai riconoscimenti e gli impegni di natura sociale". Si tratta poi in definitiva di affrontare in modo diverso la collocazione dei 'cattivi' che possono essere "persone immorali" e non già "sociopatiche". Le esigenze che Botti fa valere muovono da una elaborazione della sua propria riflessione – ricca e in continuo progresso – su di una soggettività che più di quella che io sarei in grado di catturare sulla base delle mie conoscenze ed esperienze si presenti come "porosa" alle relazioni e ai contesti. All'interno di questa concezione della soggettività dovrebbe essere percorribile una più esplicita interrogazione sulle componenti di "opacità o trasparenza" in gioco. Non posso che riconoscere l'utilità della elaborazione di una concezione di soggettività che più di quanto da me fatto nel mio libro si spinga sul piano genealogico e culturale: anche se ovviamente utili per una genealogia della soggettività umana, delle sue articolazioni e dei suoi cambiamenti, dovrebbero essere anche le indicazioni ricavate dalla ricerca evoluzionistica e delle neuroscienze. Mentre la questione di come caratterizzare i "cattivi" non mi sembra però dipendere direttamente da una eventuale integrazione della concezione di soggettività, ma piuttosto dai criteri normativi che vengono sottoscritti. Tornerò su questo punto più avanti. Nel testo di Botti mi sembra ci sia un solo suggerimento di ricaduta normativa sul piano del senso della vita di una più adeguata concezione della soggettività. Si tratta dell'accento con cui si rimarca, in contrasto con un quadro individualistico, l'importanza di impegni di natura sociale nei quali ci si sente "parte di qualcosa di più grande di sé". Anche nella mia prospettiva si salvaguarda lo spazio per la ricerca di un valore per la propria vita in qualcosa di più durevole e apprezzabile che emerge dalla consapevolezza di essere parte di qualcosa di più grande di sé. Sul piano normativo certamente questo è accettabile se diamo importanza alla consapevolezza di essere una delle manifestazioni individuali dei miliardi di viventi della specie umana e se questa consapevolezza orienta la nostra condotta etico-politica. Mentre a proposito di altri modi di cercare il significato della propria vita in qualcosa di più grande raggiunto partecipando a qualche significativa comunità, va rilevato che questi modi introducono il più delle volte un uso ristretto ed essenzialistico della nozione di identità che – come ci hanno insegnato le analisi di Amartya Sen rivolte a mostrare connessioni tra identità e la violenza – va rifiutato nella mia prospettiva.

4. LA PASSIONE CALMA CHE MUOVE ALLA RICERCA DI UN SENSO DELLA VITA E LA SUA ESTENSIONE E FORZA

Anche con Lorenzo Greco vi sono state numerose occasioni in cui abbiamo potuto confrontare le nostre ipotesi di lavoro e argomentazioni. Lo ringrazio della

finezza e chiarezza con cui riassume le mie impostazioni identificando con sicurezza i miei autori di riferimento per questo libro in Hume, Mill, Darwin e Williams, e i suoi apprezzamenti mi giungono particolarmente graditi. I suoi rilievi critici coinvolgono punti importanti della mia teoria e sono articolati con l'obiettivo di corroborare la tesi che "interrogarsi sul senso della propria esistenza perda parte della forza che gli riconosce Lecaldano". Secondo Greco avere chiaro che si muove l'interrogazione sul senso della vita in un contesto naturalistico, contingente, individualistico deve portare a riconoscere "l'esilità della significanza" cui si può mirare. Fa parte della sua strategia critica il dichiarare che lo "persuade di meno" la distinzione da me tracciata "tra ricerca del senso della vita e ricerca della felicità" rispetto a quella tracciata con il valore morale e il rifiuto di soluzioni metafisico-religiose. Secondo Greco qui si tratterebbe di fare valere di più l'impostazione di Williams che sembra accomunare la ricerca di ragioni per sopravvivere e quelle per essere felici. In fondo dobbiamo concepire la ricerca sul senso della vita come il "cercare ragioni per le nostre azioni e per ciò che vogliamo essere, ragioni che contribuiscano a renderci felici e che saremo disposti a riconoscere come buone ragioni dopo averle sottoposte a scrutinio riflessivo". Secondo Greco quindi la ricerca del senso della vita è una ricerca di buone ragioni che permettano di "continuare a vivere" e dato che il contesto in cui essa sorge è molto determinato da condizioni temporali e dai cambiamenti che queste condizioni possono segnare nel nostro carattere in fondo "la richiesta di senso è molto più fragile di quanto si vorrebbe". Questo esito Greco lo fa anche derivare dalla sua sottoscrizione – che con una perspicua e approfondita interpretazione deriva da Hume – di una "concezione narrativa dell'identità personale" nella quale la struttura connettiva non è data da giudizi intellettuali, come quelli di continuità e coerenza, ma piuttosto dalla presenza di determinate passioni. A questo proposito Greco avanza un acuto suggerimento : "il desiderio di vivere una vita che abbia senso potrebbe allora corrispondere a una passione di questo tipo (passione calma): per cui alcuni potrebbero in effetti essere guidati da una passione calma che fornisce unità alle loro vite nel tempo e che permette loro di guardare all'esistenza come qualcosa a cui va attribuito un significato". Dipende dunque dal carattere delle persone avere o meno la tendenza a "guarda(re) alla propria esistenza come un progetto che deve aver un senso compiuto e che è tenuto insieme da quel senso". Greco mi sembra fornire uno strumento di arricchimento alla mia concezione sentimentalista della ricerca sul senso della vita assimilando il contesto di questa ricerca ad una passione calma. Ci sono poi alcune specificazioni determinate lungo le quali Greco articola la delineazione di questa passione calma che presiede alla capacità di cercare un senso alla vita, che non mi sembrano del tutto convincenti. In primo luogo una qualche tendenza a restringere – o almeno così sembra – l'estensione di questo carattere tra gli esseri umani, laddove tenderei a considerarlo presente in tutta la

specie umana anche se – come del resto accade per la riflessività morale – contornato da situazioni che ne ostacolano una piena presenza nella consapevolezza: per cui la fragilità che più conta rilevare può essere quella della diffusività della presenza nelle consapevolezze delle vite degli esseri umani più che nella esilità della forza delle soluzioni. Greco tratteggia “un’accezione più debole di senso della vita, per la quale essa è un tentativo continuo fatto sempre dal punto di vista presente, di essere felici, che consiste nel darsi ragioni che resistano a uno scrutinio riflessivo e che ci permettano di continuare a vivere”. In realtà avrei da obiettare all’assimilazione di questa ricerca con quella della felicità mentre per quanto riguarda la forza delle risposte alla ricerca sul senso della vita mi sembra che mi attribuisca una concezione troppo forte come se suggerissi che le risposte debbono essere compiute – forse perfezioniste – ecc. Mi spiace di avere dato questa impressione e nel caso ne faccio ammenda. D’altra parte avrei dubbi nel considerare tutta la ricerca come una ricerca di “ragioni” e certamente mi sembra da accantonare la tesi che tende ad unificare la ricerca del senso della vita con quella della felicità. In fondo nel corso di una passeggiata in montagna tra gli alberi o lungo il mare o di una pausa ascoltando musica nel nostro studio, o di una condivisione di esperienze con persone che ci sono care, potremmo ripercorrere intensamente e rapidamente un nucleo di ricordi della nostra vita passata e guadagnare così facendo una prospettiva pacificante che ci rinvigorisce e ci spinge a continuare sulla strada che avevamo scelto (o in caso diverso, di fronte al manifestarsi di tensioni irresolubili, provando a cambiare). Non necessariamente questa ricerca deve essere espressa e formulata ricorrendo ad argomenti o espressioni linguistiche: ricostruirla come un flusso o susseguirsi di immagini mentali come in un film mi sembra forse più efficace. Nulla vieta che nel corso di questa passeggiata, pausa nel nostro studiolo o esperienza condivisa con altri ci si renda conto dell’infelicità che ci accompagna, ma pur tuttavia non ce la sentiamo proprio di abbandonare le nostre opzioni e di andare contro alcuni nostri desideri così profondi da fare parte (ne siamo consapevoli) del nostro carattere, che ci spingono a persistere. E tutto questo procedere in continuità con le nostre opzioni del passato può anche darci un qualche piacere che però mi sembrerebbe improprio provare a catturare usando una nozione così ampia e indeterminata come quella di felicità. Considerare tutta questa ricerca come rivolta alla felicità è proprio quello che da alla ricerca di un senso nella nostra vita una portata e forza eccessiva: la felicità laddove non sia una formula generica per una indefinita ricerca rinvia a qualcosa che spesso pretende ad una qualche continuità e stabilità e che si può possedere e guadagnare (o che comunque si tende a possedere e guadagnare in qualche forma definitiva). Mentre di certo come ripeto ancora una volta il senso della propria vita non può in alcun modo essere cristallizzato come un risultato, ma è piuttosto un orizzonte di valore che ci accompagna fino all’ultimo istante di vita consapevole. Certo Hume delineava i suoi quattro ritratti di carattere – platonico,

stoico, epicureo e scettico – come diverse concezioni della felicità, ma così facendo voleva fare tesoro della concezione eudemonistica della cultura classica. Nel quadro antropologico moderno di Hume invece a dare spessore nella condotta personale alla ricerca della felicità è – come emerge in particolare dai suoi saggi economici e politici – una sorta di continuo “disagio” (*uneasiness*) che sposta sempre ulteriormente l’ottenimento di una soddisfazione e che si connette principalmente con la vita economica e la ricerca di ricchezze. Facendo nostra la distinzione tra i diversi tipi di beni di Hume o la sua risposta allo stolto, non possiamo certo collocare lungo queste linee un progetto di vita sensato.

5. IL RUOLO DELLE CONGETTURE IMMAGINARIE NELLA RICERCA FILOSOFICA E LA CAMICIA DI FORZA DEI MERCATI

La vivace ricostruzione del mio libro sviluppata da Pierpaolo Marrone è ricca di puntualizzazioni teoriche e di elaborazioni critiche da discutere. Il suo testo è rivolto a chiarire meglio l’interconnessione tra “tre dimensioni [...]: quella autobiografica, quella soggettiva (che alla prima si sovrappone, ma non è detto si identifichi), quella dell’autonomia personale” che sono coinvolte e intrecciate nel contesto problematico del mio libro. Nel discutere le mie tesi Marrone del tutto opportunamente chiama in causa alcune sue esperienze personali: così facendo allarga in modo suggestivo l’insieme di situazioni del quale deve tenere conto una teorizzazione sulla ricerca umana di un senso della vita (ad esempio rinvia al caso della piccola star di Instagram Angela Nikolau). Marrone ritiene che in genere “la vertigine del Senso della vita” sembra si presenti “quando viviamo delle esperienze intense”, ma pur tuttavia ci è più facile rintracciare questo senso della vita quando siamo impegnati “nella meccanicità del vivere quotidiano”. Marrone pure condividendo la mia caratterizzazione scettica dell’identità personale al seguito di Hume ritiene che io non segua, come dovrei, questa strada con “uno scetticismo analogo sull’idea di individuo”: ove estendessi il mio scetticismo in questa direzione dovrei condividere con Marrone le perplessità “sull’insistenza e la fiducia [...] nell’autonomia del soggetto individuale”. Secondo quanto osserva Marrone – ma come abbiamo visto anche altri hanno sollevato questa obiezione – usando questa nozione si dovrebbe esplicitamente affrontare la questione della genealogia di questo concetto. Un’analisi critica della nozione di individuo è secondo Marrone importante per riesaminare le idee sul collegamento tra senso della vita ed immortalità: il mio modo di istituire questo collegamento è proprio quello che mi spinge a “rigettare il legame tra senso della vita e immortalità”. Marrone però argomenta che ci sono molti problemi che “non rendono convincente [...] la negazione del legame tra senso della vita e immortalità. In particolare egli contesta la fertilità dell’analisi di Williams sulla noia che si connetterebbe con l’immortalità

annullando qualsiasi dimensione di senso. Rileva Marrone: “se per immortalità si intende un’ esistenza infinita a partire da qualche momento allora io credo che la noia sia un’opzione che potrebbe anche non comparire”. Richiamando una serie di analisi e di esempi la tesi di Marrone è quella di invitarci ad immaginare “di avere mille anni e di avere l’aspetto fisico e la salute di una persona di 25 anni”: tenere conto di un caso del genere ci aiuta a rifiutare l’idea che “l’immortalità regali necessariamente la noia”. Il problema sembra essere piuttosto con la vecchiaia e il decadimento e non già con l’immortalità o la continuazione infinita e laddove si immagini di superare queste condizioni anche l’immortalità può contribuire a dare un senso. Ancora Marrone rivendica: “a me non pare che le persone usualmente pensino che vivere da immortali potrebbe essere una sventura”. Quindi conclude la sua analisi scrivendo: “l’immortalità né è ostativa al senso della vita inteso come una esperienza complessiva di senso e gratificazione anche non edonistica né è legata a prospettive religiose”. Mi limiterei a sottolineare la difficoltà che all’interno di una prospettiva naturalistica ed empiristica allo stato attuale ci si possa interrogare sul senso della vita dando per immaginabile quella radicale trasformazione della vita includendovi quelle modifiche che immagina Marrone: le lunghe analisi di Hume nel *Trattato sulla natura umana* sul funzionamento dell’immaginazione insistono su una serie di vincoli in termini di somiglianza, contiguità spazio-temporale e causalità che non permettono queste estensioni. Naturalmente vi sono anche altri modelli di immaginazione che con il linguaggio humeano possiamo più propriamente caratterizzare come fantasia (*fancy*), in cui i casi che si propongono vanno al di là di qualsiasi esperienza noi abbiamo avuto e anche delle condizioni biologiche e sociali della vita umana finora. In effetti la riflessione filosofica dopo la pubblicazione del libro di Derek Parfit *Ragioni e persone* (libro del 1984 tradotto in italiano nel 1989 da il Saggiatore) si è interrogata sulla estensione del ricorso nell’analisi filosofica ai casi immaginari. Parfit ricorreva ad un teletrasporto immaginario che permetteva di ricostituire una persona terrestre su di un altro pianeta. Questo caso serviva a Parfit per mettere alla prova il concetto di ‘identità’, già per altro scosso dalle critiche di Hume e serviva forse a mettere da parte definitivamente il concetto di identità. Il caso “fantastico” di Marrone dilata le condizioni di funzionamento del concetto di ‘immortalità’ in modo tale da farcene vedere l’essenzialità per la ricerca sul senso della vita; date le premesse epistemologiche da cui muovevo nel mio testo è però proprio il concetto di immortalità in quanto tale a fare problema: a difettare di una traducibilità più o meno diretta, rappresentativa o espressionistica, nell’universo di esperienze in cui ci muoviamo. È quindi difficile percorrere a questo proposito le strategie che Marrone propone. Va anche detto che anche nel suo testo sembra accettato il punto che per me è centrale sulla irrilevanza nella ricerca del senso della vita dell’orizzonte dell’ immortalità. Anche negli esempi fatti da Marrone non mi sembra che sia la continuazione infinita di certe esperienze a dare senso alla vita

ma il fatto che queste esperienze comunque siano giudicate come fornite di valore. Marrone infine ritiene che a proposito del senso della vita “una risposta che riguarda molti di noi, tendenzialmente tutti noi, possa essere tracciata”. Il punto è che “una parte notevole delle vite di ciascuno di noi ha significato in quanto consumatori di merci e in quanto merci noi stessi”. Prendendo atto dunque che noi tutti siamo immersi nel contesto del capitalismo, proprio in questo contesto si può ritrovare la genesi della nozione di individualità: infatti al di là della risposta che riguarda ciascuno di noi in termini di “fitness evolutiva” secondo Marrone questa risposta in termini di consumatori di merce fino al punto di divenire noi stessi merce sarebbe quella oggi prevalente. Va vista dunque la “finzione individualistica” come “del tutto coerente con l’idea della sovranità del consumatore”. Per cui in parte si deve avere a che fare con la tesi “che il senso della vita di noi per qualcun altro, dentro il capitalismo, è proprio la nostra esistenza come consumatori”. Questa attenzione permetterebbe di evitare l’inadeguatezza di una impostazione che “guarda al senso della vita come un problema introspettivo che nasce dentro il soggetto individuale e nel soggetto individuale si esaurisce”, prospettiva “nobile” che non permette di aprirsi all’idea che il senso della vita si potrebbe realizzare a nostra insaputa proprio in quel destino secolare che il capitalismo è” per cui “tutto proprio tutto può divenire “. Questa risposta al senso della vita permetterebbe di dare una risposta universalistica che prende atto del destino del capitalismo. “quello appunto di ridurre tutto a merce”: “abbandonato il mito del soggetto sostanziale, io credo che dobbiamo anche abbandonare il mito dell’individuo e dell’autonomia, che quella ricerca del SDV sorregge e cercarlo appunto altrove”. Lo spirito critico che muove queste analisi di Marrone è molto apprezzabile: certamente colgono alcune dimensioni di alienazione che attraversano le nostre vite in un mondo che specialmente se ci muoviamo a livello di realtà mass-mediale e virtuale percepiamo come intrinsecamente globalizzato ed egemonizzato dai mercati: è questo il linguaggio in cui si vuole che noi ci immergiamo come una sorta di unica realtà, cosa che viene efficacemente illustrato dal bel film di Peter Weir, *The Truman Show* (1998, ma alla fine di questo film si apre un orizzonte di liberazione). Mi sembra però di non potermi muovere lungo queste strategie per ragioni non solo epistemologiche, ma anche di storia delle idee. In particolare nella prospettiva che elaboro non è percorribile la via che ritiene che la nostra vita possa avere un senso del quale non siamo consapevoli: la ricerca del senso della vita si colloca completamente nella vita psicologica consapevole che ciascun essere umano è in grado di condurre. Naturalmente tutto questo può essere solo un sogno o (come suggeriva ironicamente Bertrand Russell) solo un incubo. Ma poi dovremmo ricostruire appunto la genealogia di questo incubo e mi sembra che un filone di filosofia sociale che va dagli Scozzesi Hume e Smith all’indiano Amartya Sen permetta di disarticolare un’analisi centrata su

nozioni quali 'capitalismo' e 'mercati'. Queste nozioni andrebbero trattate come *idola fori* del nostro tempo e ad esse si dovrebbe applicare una sistematica analisi decostruzionista (trattate più o meno come si trattano soggetto, autonomia, individualità). Certo leggendo i giornali e seguendo i telegiornali alcuni, a partire da chi scrive, non riescono a seguire e partecipare alla horror story che ci viene ammazzata quotidianamente su ciò che “vogliono i mercati”.

6. UNA METRICA PER GESTIRE LA DIVERSITÀ TRA SENSATEZZA E MORALITÀ?

Anche Gianfranco Pellegrino nel suo ampio e approfondito intervento mette al centro della sua discussione critica la questione delle relazioni tra la ricerca del senso della vita e la moralità. Pellegrino discute anche, ma in modo meno sistematico, la distinzione da me tracciata tra ricerca del senso della vita e ricerca della felicità che riconduce del tutto correttamente alla distinzione tra ricerca del senso della vita e considerazioni di prudenza; questa assimilazione deriva dal fatto che Pellegrino abbraccia complessivamente l'impostazione teorica dell'utilitarismo. “Nel caso della prudenza la tesi di Lecaldano è che il senso della vita sia del tutto indipendente, e non solo distinto, dalla ricerca della felicità e del benessere”. Oltre a rimarcare questo punto Pellegrino sottolinea che io costruisco “una concezione sentimentalista e individualista del senso della vita” e che all'interno di questa sostengo che “processi di riflessione e generalizzazione simili a quelli che, nelle metaetiche sentimentaliste ed espressiviste, costituiscono il punto di vista morale a partire da un immaginario spettatore imparziale e bene informato rendono conto dell'idea che ciò che dà senso alla nostra vita possa anche essere compreso dagli altri come sensato e dotato di valore”. Va rilevato che Pellegrino in nota dà come esemplificazione di una “argomentazione della psicopatia” un passo in cui io faccio riferimento a vite di persone affette da disturbi psichiatrici come possibilmente sensate: per cui manifesterei una “oscillazione”. Forse si può fare qui una precisazione – ma certo non ho l'autorevolezza professionale per sorreggere più di tanto questo discorso. Mi sembra si debba tenere distinta la tesi che vi sono disturbi psichiatrici in una persona dal giudizio che quella persona è psicopatica: vi sono disturbi psichiatrici che non sono una forma di psicopatia socialmente connotata ed è appunto per quello che ritengo che vi possano essere alcune persone con disturbi psichiatrici che non sono psicopatici che possono avere vite dotate di un senso: forse questo è il caso del matematico John Nash al centro della ricostruzione biografica di *A Beautiful Mind* (film di Ron Howard del 2001 tratto dalla biografia di Sylvia Nasar, *Il genio dei numeri*).

Ma è appunto sulla questione della distinzione tra ricerca del senso della vita e rispetto della moralità che Pellegrino elabora la sua critica. Come spiega: “la mia conclusione quindi sarà la seguente: o non c'è distinzione alcuna fra moralità e

senso della vita, o, se una distinzione si pone, allora c'è una indipendenza assoluta fra le due sfere. Entrambe le opzioni tuttavia sono problematiche: se si afferma che non c'è distinzione, si corre il rischio di abbracciare una visione moralista; se c'è indipendenza assoluta, si deve accettare la sensatezza di vite immorali, il che molti di noi non vorrebbero fare. Di conseguenza, un ulteriore lavoro di riflessione è necessario, per trovare una visione più adeguata della relazione fra moralità e senso della vita". L'inadeguatezza della mia posizione si legherebbe anche al fatto che riprendendo la distinzione tra valore morale, valore prudenziale e valore del senso della vita per ciascuna di queste diverse sfere di valore individuerei (con S. Wolf) differenti specie di ragioni. Ma Pellegrino obietta che "la tesi classificatoria triadica delle ragioni vale in terza persona forse, ma non in prima persona". Il contrasto nella vita personale non è mai tra differenti tipi categorici di ragioni "ma fra ragioni specifiche". Una obiezione analoga a quella mossa da Bacin (vedi sopra). L'obiezione di Pellegrino però non sembra tenere conto che nella prospettiva da me percorsa la ricerca sul senso della vita è da ritenersi collegata con un esame del proprio carattere visto in collegamento con la propria condotta passata o futura. Se questo è ciò che è in gioco si capisce forse perché alcune volte la motivazione della nostra condotta vedrà prevalere un riconoscimento di senso e in altri il prevalere di una considerazione morale o di benessere ecc.. Ma nel flusso della vita psicologica non avremo bisogno di stabilizzare tutto questo ritenendo che noi si debba richiamare in ciascuna diversa situazioni delle ragioni categoriche diverse, siano esse morali o di senso o prudenziali. Nella continuità del nostro carattere tipi diversi di ragioni o sentimenti e di azioni si mescolano, ma di volta in volta prevalgono l'un tipo o l'altro. Si ricordi che la nozione di carattere che stiamo usando è quella molto fragile che troviamo in David Hume niente affatto ontologica o costitutiva ma solo funzionale e regolativa per rendere conto della continuità e stabilità in gioco con la responsabilità morale: una concezione funzionale e regolativa di carattere che adottiamo anche nel contesto più proprio della ricerca sul senso della vita. Il suo statuto non va dunque al di là delle condizioni di funzionamento che noi ricostruiamo della ricerca sul senso della vita.

Preciso comunque che da una parte Pellegrino non difende in quanto tale il linguaggio delle "ragioni" e dall'altra è solo il mio accanimento sentimentalistico che mi fa diffidare di qualsiasi uso della parola 'ragione'. Ma concedendo questa preoccupazione Pellegrino scrive: "non intendo assumere nessuna interpretazione particolarmente razionalistica: le ragioni cui faccio riferimento si possono intendere come ragioni interne, nel senso spiegato in Williams, e come moventi sentimentali o passionali". Dopo avere fatto questa precisazione Pellegrino ribadisce che muovendosi nella prospettiva in prima persona non è sensato attribuire alle persone una considerazione in generale come elemento pratico sia essa mediata dai valori o dalle ragioni. Il fatto è che "attribuire agli agenti una preoccupazione per il

giusto o il bene, come insieme di ragioni di un certo tipo, o per il senso della propria vita, è errato: come spiegava B. Williams, è attribuire loro 'un pensiero di troppo', una ragione di troppo in questo caso". Pellegrino richiama l'interpretazione – da me già utilizzata – che dell'analisi anti-edonistica di Butler avrebbe ripreso Hume con la sua teoria della motivazione e enuncia, rinviando a ciascuno dei possibili caratteri legati al senso della vita (il filantropo, l'artista, l'intellettuale e l'epicureo), una critica. Questa critica così suona discutendo in particolare la scelta filantropica del senso della vita: "nella sua consapevolezza intima, quando constata che la sua vita ha senso, il filantropo non dirà – almeno se non è un tipo umano diverso, cioè un moralista, o un filosofo morale eccessivamente concentrato sull'oggetto dei suoi studi – che la sua vita ha senso perché improntata alla moralità. È più probabile che egli affermerà, invece, che la sua vita ha senso perché aiutare i migranti è un valore indubbio, e perché egli trova in questo valore il senso della propria vita". Un sentimentalista e particolarista come me dovrebbe accettare e non perdere di vista questo orizzonte per cui si afferma "che le persone agiscono per moventi specifici e particolari e particolari e specifici sono i fattori che danno senso alla vita – e nessuno distingue dall'interno fra moralità e senso della vita. Pertanto non c'è una distinzione concettuale tra moralità e senso della vita". In generale poi Pellegrino rileva che quello del senso della vita può essere considerato un concetto spesso, e "all'interno dei concetti spessi non si fanno distinzioni concettuali come quella fra moralità ed estetica, o fra moralità e prudenza. All'interno dei concetti spessi c'è continuità fra quelle che a uno sguardo classificatorio filosofico, possono sembrare sfere differenti". Detto ciò pur apprezzando lo stimolo di Pellegrino alla concretezza nel lavoro di analisi filosofica nel rispondere possiamo fare due precisazioni. Una riguarda l'interessante suggerimento di considerare quello di senso della vita come un concetto spesso. Avrei dubbi su tale suggerimento in quanto quella che sto analizzando è una pratica di ricerca del senso della vita che è sullo stesso piano di moralità, estetica, economia ecc. I concetti spessi riguardano un altro livello quello ad esempio delle virtù di prudenza, coraggio. Per la dimensione del senso della vita di concetto spesso potremmo parlare a proposito delle diverse soluzioni che si offrono (filantropo ecc.) ma non sarei sicuro che valga per la pratica in quanto tale: le pratiche sono i contesti all'interno dei quali si cristallizzano i concetti spessi. In secondo luogo va rilevato che l'analisi filosofica non può minimamente avvicinarsi con il suo lavoro alla concretezza e complessità del flusso psicologico interiore. Può solo occuparsi di questo continuo flusso cercando di imbrigliarlo con mappe e articolazioni per connettere le varie dimensioni. Una teoria internalista e particolarista della motivazione non sembra contraddirsi se quando si passa al lavoro analitico si registrano aree o campi diversi di connotazione nella vita umana.

Pellegrino poi prosegue le sue critiche in quanto rileva che l'impostazione del mio libro ha una sua "instabilità" di fondo in quanto presenterebbe la ricerca della

moralità e quella di un senso nella vita come sfere distinte ma non indipendenti. Il punto è che “la distinzione senza indipendenza, per come la descrive Lecaldano, sembrerebbe implicare che i valori che danno senso alla vita e i valori morali si possano collocare su una scala unica (siano commensurabili)”. Pellegrino cerca di procedere in modo meno approssimativo e di elaborare uno schema preciso che ponendo su un'unica scala l'intreccio tra moralità e sensatezza sia in grado di trattare la diversità di incidenza nelle vite di Gauguin e di Hitler della rilevanza della moralità in correlazione alla loro sensatezza. L'esito di questa brillante ricostruzione di dettaglio del confronto tra le vite di Gauguin e quella di Hitler con l'indubbia diversità che in essa gioca il peso di una condotta immoralmente disapprovabile mostra l'impercorribilità di una strategia preoccupata di mettere le cose in modo più preciso: “dunque, o si separa del tutto moralità e senso della vita, cadendo nell'immoralismo, o si unificano le due sfere, accettando il moralismo. Una distinzione senza indipendenza sarebbe auspicabile, ma è concettualmente instabile e contraddittoria. Ancora una volta se Gauguin ha una vita sensata anche Hitler dovrebbe avercela, e se quest'ultimo non ce l'ha neanche il primo può averla”. In definitiva secondo Pellegrino “non si può dare un giudizio così netto sulle vite drasticamente immorali”. Per cui “l'unica maniera di distinguere plausibilmente fra moralità e senso della vita a questo punto diventa di assumere che ci sia indipendenza piena”. A suo parere una impostazione sentimentalista dovrebbe privilegiare una particolare e tipica concezione della natura umana che tenderà a dare ai sentimenti morali un ruolo centrale e a ricondurre ad essi tutte le altre valutazioni. Mentre se non si muove riconoscendo una concezione tipica della natura umana non potremo che essere costretti ad ammettere che anche la vita di Hitler sia sensata.

Nel tentativo di mostrare le difficoltà della mia concezione del senso della vita Pellegrino suggerisce che non si capisce perché escludo di potere ammettere che dal suo punto di vista Hitler potesse considerare sensata la sua vita. Da una prospettiva esterna poi ci sono elementi che nella sua analisi Pellegrino fa valere secondo la quale dovremmo riconoscere, se ammettiamo la distinzione tra il piano della sensatezza e quello della moralità, che la vita di Hitler era in definitiva più sensata di quella di Stavrogin dei *Demoni* di Dostoevskij perché l'insensatezza in questo caso è registrata da una confessione che riconosce il fallimento, confessione che non è presente alla fine della vita di Hitler. Inoltre in fondo dovremmo riconoscere queste due vite come più sensate di quella del giocatore compulsivo di video poker. Proverei a contestare questi dubbi mostrando comunque la paradossalità di una strada che giunge a riconoscere come sensata la vita di Hitler. Lo sforzo immaginativo di calarci nei panni di Hitler comporta chiaramente percorrere una strada normativa, non potendo certo noi immaginare di seguire il flusso interiore della vita psicologica di questo paranoico sociale e simpatizzare così

tanto con questo flusso da riuscire a collocare al suo interno quel minimo di continuità e valore che accompagna un esito positivo della ricerca di senso nella propria vita. Ce la possiamo cavare spostandoci nella dimensione del mistero e della fede che però non è percorribile da un naturalista che non crederà che tutte le vite devono essere perdonate assumendo la prospettiva del Dio cristiano (o forse alcune perdonate ma comunque mandate all'inferno?). In genere nel mio libro assumo una posizione caritatevole verso la diversità delle altre vite riconoscendo che il modo migliore per rispettare questa diversità è di fare un uso molto limitato del giudizio normativo di sensatezza sulle altre vite. Questa impostazione non è solo la presa d'atto psicologica che la ricerca sul senso di una vita è percorribile solo in prima persona, ma di una opzione normativa che sostiene che qualsiasi pratica umana abbia a che fare con valori deve essere interpretata in modo tale da permettere l'accesso a tutti gli esseri umani. Ma questa è solo una esigenza di tipo meta (naturalmente formulata in modo tale che mostra il forte intreccio di meta e normatività) che non comporta dovere sottoscrivere un relativismo sul piano normativo che riconosce che tutte le vite dal loro punto di vista sono sensate. Questo esito è una ricaduta nichilistica che accompagna come è chiaro quella filosofia secondo la quale qualsiasi forma di soggettivismo è incapace di guadagnare una qualche forma di oggettività normativa, ma non è questo il paradigma all'interno del quale mi muovo. Sul piano normativo dunque avendo a che fare con vite come quelle di Hitler non è percorribile la strada di riconoscere un qualche senso alla sua vita non perdendo di vista nella ricerca di un giudizio su questa vita che essa ha provocato morti, danni e sofferenze per decine di milioni di altri esseri umani. A questo punto provando a fare un confronto con qualche grossolana metrica, perfino immaginare la vita del "giocatore compulsivo di videopoker" potrebbe presentarsi come una faccenda diversa portandoci a qualche esitazione in quanto con essa non si presentano tutte queste altre immagini di danni e uccisioni, e dunque potremmo essere più ironici (cosa che io non riesco a fare) sulla sua vita. La normatività che si esprime nel caso del giocatore di poker compulsivo è specificamente quella che ha a che fare con la sensatezza della vita nella sua peculiarità, e dunque introducendo in essa una prevalenza della componente di apertura si potrebbe anche sospendere il giudizio cosa che non si può certo fare nel caso della vita di Hitler. Ci sono sforzi oggi in romanzi (si pensi al *Le benevole* di Jonathan Littel) o in film, tentativi di ricostruire come sensate le vite dei nazisti o degli aguzzini dello stalinismo ecc.: talvolta spinti al di là dei processi di empatia e simpatia per dare corpo a quella attrazione per l'orrido riconoscibile in molto cinema e letteratura odierne impegnata in una dilatazione ossessiva dello spazio di Frankenstein. Ma si tratta di strade che appunto concepiscono la ricostruzione delle vicende di una persona e della sua identità in termini narrativi. Questa strada è bloccata laddove come nella prospettiva che percorro nel mio libro la vita non viene presentata come una narrazione all'interno

di una ricerca della sua sensatezza, ma come un'attualizzazione come componente di una passione che apre o chiude alla possibilità di riconoscere la sensatezza della vita in esame. Mi sembra che ci sia un problema per una interpretazione narrativa dell'identità personale all'interno di una impostazione sentimentalista. Infatti il narrativismo suggerisce che l'identità personale sia trascrivibile in una narrazione, mentre l'analisi sentimentalista riterrà che una qualche identità si presenta come contenuto di qualche passione come l'orgoglio, l'amore ecc. Il narrativismo forse dà ancora troppa importanza a quella identità che invece una concezione humanea tende a derubricare non considerandola né essenziale, né centrale, né autonoma, ma solo in quanto parte di una passione o come elemento di continuità locale in una successione di eventi psicologici. Dunque in questa prospettiva non è immaginabile che una passione di orgoglio minimamente approvabile e comprensibile possa essere fatta dipendere dal riconoscere senso a condotte di cui chi sviluppa la riflessione è stato responsabile, che hanno provocato torture e uccisioni per milioni di esseri umani. Senza un qualche orgoglio della propria vita non si dà riconoscimento del senso della propria vita (come in fondo il caso Stavrogin sottolinea). Non c'è nessun senso nella vita di Hitler anche se questa acquisizione di insensatezza non è stata espressa in una qualche confessione esplicita (o forse sì ? Chi ci vieta di immaginarlo come ultimo atto della vita di Hitler?). Il fatto che non si riesca ad articolare una metrica precisa (per ora) non dipende solo dalla insostenibilità di una strada che provi a tenere insieme criteri di moralità e di sensatezza, ma può dipendere dai pesi con cui si rappresentano in questa metrica i diversi valori (e dunque dalla necessità di trovarne altri): oppure proprio dal fatto che la strada di una metrica non è quella percorribile quando si ha a che fare con bilanciamenti tra diversi sentimenti nei quali non conta in definitiva la quantità, ma probabilmente la qualità. Tutte queste risposte sfortunatamente non superano il livello del pressappoco, ma chi scrive non ritiene proprio che l'analisi filosofica sia o debba divenire una scienza o che come scienze debbano essere ricostruite le pratiche della moralità e della ricerca di un senso nella vita. Concludere così può essere conciliato con il riconoscere, come subito vedremo, che queste varie pratiche si intrecciano con le scienze in molti modi.

7. I VARI INTRECCI TRA SCIENZE E RICERCHE DI UN SENSO NELLA VITA

Nel caso dell'intervento di Simone Pollo mi sono trovato di fronte più che ad una critica ad un aiuto per un'ulteriore elaborazione della mia prospettiva. Pollo condivide il mio suggerimento che la ricerca filosofica non debba sottrarsi alla sollecitazione di occuparsi anche della questione del senso della vita e presenta un'utile esemplificazione di un caso di vita sensata malgrado il completo

insuccesso: la biografia di Christopher McCandless (al centro di un recente film di S.Penn) impegnato a cercare “un modo di vita autentico a contatto con la natura”. Nel suo intervento Pollo suggerisce di integrare la mia prospettiva indagando “più analiticamente il tema dell’intreccio fra ricerca del senso della vita e conoscenza scientifica”. Egli procede sulla base di una premessa che condivido pienamente che “una ricerca che si colloca in uno scenario naturalistico [ha] possibilità di articolazione e fioritura che non appaiono disponibili, ad esempio, in un contesto di credenze religiose e soprannaturali”. In particolare Pollo sviluppa una “tassonomia dei possibili modi in cui l’interrogarsi sul senso della vita e la ricerca/conoscenza scientifica entrano in comunicazione”. Mi sembra fertile la sua linea di differenziazione di questi modi: “anzitutto c’è la possibilità che la scienza sottoponga ai propri metodi di indagine l’area di esperienza della ricerca sul senso della vita. In secondo luogo c’è la scienza come attività concreta di esseri umani che in questa pratica danno senso alla propria esistenza. Infine c’è la scienza come fonte di conoscenze che entrano nelle personali riflessioni circa il senso della vita”. Per Pollo è auspicabile la realizzazione di “una scienza del senso della vita”, auspicio accettabile tenuto conto che il piano di intervento di questa scienza dovrebbe essere quello esplicativo e genealogico e non già quello normativo e prescrittivo. Così come mi sembra fertile il modo in cui Pollo inizia questo percorso, mostrando il “valore conoscitivo di una contestualizzazione evolucionistica” della ricostruzione della pratica umana di una ricerca sul senso della vita suggerendo di fare valere “una prospettiva non antropocentrica”. Inserire questa ricerca scientifica sul senso della vita in una prospettiva non antropocentrica può risultare una impostazione accettabile se quello che si ha di mira sono le risposte. Un po' meno ovvio risulta se si vuole fare valere questa impostazione per la contestualizzazione delle domande sul senso della vita per gli esseri umani. Si presenta qui una tensione che lo stesso Pollo ha chiaramente diagnosticato nel suo recente libro *Umani e animali: questioni di etica* (Carocci, Roma, 2016) quando ha scritto: “un compito per la riflessione morale ordinaria e l’analisi filosofica è quello di portare alla luce il punto di vista umano che accompagna le considerazioni morali antiantropocentriche e sottoporle a critica e revisione [...]”. La stessa esigenza va fatta valere anche nella ricerca sul senso della vita e probabilmente questa esigenza anche in questo caso dovrà fare leva sulla consapevolezza dei limiti delle passioni e delle simpatie umane. Infatti se prestiamo attenzione al contesto in cui si collocano le domande risulterà difficile capire (o almeno sembra esserlo allo stato attuale della ricerca) come gli animali si interrogano sul senso della vita e non riconoscere che laddove non ci fosse nessun essere umano non potrebbe certo sopravvivere la ricerca di un senso della vita (una conclusione analoga a quella che possiamo fare valere per l’etica). Giustamente poi Pollo richiama la biografia di Charles Darwin come concretizzazione della seconda area della sua tassonomia, ovvero come esemplificazione di una vita che ha cercato e trovato il suo senso

proprio nella conoscenza scientifica: “la storia personale di Darwin mostra in che modo una vita possa trovare senso nel perseguimento della conoscenza scientifica e in questa attività trasformarsi riflessivamente”. Un caso analogo potremmo indicare anche nel caso di Robert Oppenheimer, la cui biografia è stata in questa luce ricostruita recentemente da Ray Monk, *Robert Oppenheimer. L'uomo che inventò la bomba atomica*, Bompiani, Milano, 2014. Una vita che ci potrebbe aiutare ad impostare meglio la questione della connessione tra il riconoscere di trovarsi di fronte a vite che ricercano un loro senso e giudizio positivo sulle risposte che sono state fornite alla luce delle eventuali conseguenze dannose o pericolose per gli altri. Pollo in questo quadro accenna appunto ad un problema legato al caso Mengele ovvero se possiamo squalificare la sua ricerca e curiosità scientifica come centro di una vita. Non impegnandosi in questa linea di approfondimento Pollo avverte solo che è da evitare il pericolo della “moralizzazione della scienza” ovvero escludere una certa attività come falsa scienza facendo valere impropriamente criteri moralistici. Questa impostazione sembra convincente nel caso dell'impegno di Oppenheimer per accrescere la conoscenza dei mesoni, che può essere valutato indipendentemente dall'esito che esso ha avuto di una fisica capace di creare la bomba atomica, ma non sembra accettabile nel caso delle sperimentazioni di Mengele. Infine Pollo esamina il caso in cui la conoscenza scientifica “può essere una fonte per l'attività riflessiva dei singoli esseri umani impegnati nelle domande circa il senso della vita”. Anche qui Pollo sfrutta le risorse del quadro darwiniano: “la prospettiva in cui ci mette lo scenario darwiniano è proprio questa: la ricerca sul senso della vita può fiorire se guarda alla coltivazione della nostra soggettività e alle relazioni piuttosto che entrare nel vicolo cieco della ricerca di una corrispondenza a ordini dati e situati oltre la nostra esperienza sensibile”. Come nel caso della morale qui le dimensioni normative coinvolte nelle risposte a proposito del senso della vita funzionano “in quanto corrispondano in modo appropriato al mondo così come esso è”. In questo quadro secondo Pollo le dimensioni “dell'antifinalismo e dell'antiantropocentrismo che accompagnano la conoscenza evoluzionista risultano estremamente fertili per una valida impostazione della ricerca sul senso della vita”. Tesi ovviamente che è del tutto condivisa da me. Inoltre la ricerca sul senso della vita secondo Pollo può fare tesoro di un'altra acquisizione che ricava dalle conoscenze evoluzionistiche, ovvero che “un'interrogazione sulla propria esistenza possa arricchirsi di una concezione della soggettività aperta in senso non antropocentrico alla relazione con il mondo non umano in prospettiva ecologica”. Pollo quindi sottolinea che non solo le arti e le discipline umanistiche possano giocare un ruolo nella riflessione sul senso della vita, ma anche che “in una visione naturalizzata e pluralista della vita umana e dei suoi beni la scienza è una fonte primaria di conoscenza del mondo e un motore di trasformazione delle nostre vite, anche nella più personale attività di interrogazione e ricerca del loro senso”. A

ulteriore integrazione dei suggerimenti di Pollo sottolineerei come una generale impostazione evolucionistica e aperta alle acquisizioni delle conoscenze potrebbe anche aiutare a elaborare una sorta di storia naturale delle risposte umane sul senso della vita. Qualcosa di analogo a quello che muovendo da una prospettiva evolucionistica ha cercato di fare Michel Tomasello per la morale (*Storia naturale della morale umana*, Milano, Cortina, 2016) e di quello che a proposito delle variazioni delle principali istituzioni sociali provarono a fare Hume e Smith articolando una teoria stadiale. Si tratterebbe infatti di raccogliere dati per mettere a punto ipotesi e congetture a posteriori sui principali mutamenti riscontrabili nelle risposte offerte dagli esseri umani alla ricerca di un senso della vita. Proviamo ad accennare ad un esempio: quello della ricerca sull'indebolirsi o rafforzarsi o distribuirsi nelle diverse culture e periodi delle risposte dipendenti da un'apertura ad un quadro di trascendenza religiosa e un diffondersi di quelle che si muovono all'interno di un contesto interamente naturalizzato. Ovviamente qui c'è tutto uno spazio da elaborare che come suggerisce Pollo può essere visto come ricaduta della estensione delle esigenze di una scientificizzazione anche alla ricostruzione della pratica della ricerca sul senso della vita.

8. SOGGETTIVISMO E IRRELIGIOSITÀ COME LIMITI DI UNA PROSPETTIVA SUL SENSO DELLA VITA?

Reichlin sintetizzando con sapienza i punti centrali del mio libro individua cinque aspetti fondamentali della mia impostazione che sarebbe vincolata dalla considerazione della teoria evolucionista come contesto in cui muoversi: l'aver adottato "il punto di vista soggettivo interno"; avere insistito sul carattere "essenzialmente comunicabile del significato della vita umana"; avere tracciato la "netta distinzione tra la ricerca sul senso della vita e [...] la riflessione morale [...] e la riflessione su ciò che contribuisce al benessere della vita umana o che la rende felice"; avere sottoscritto un "netto rifiuto di ogni prospettiva di ordine teologico o religioso"; infine collegare il senso della vita strettamente "allo sviluppo di un carattere individuale piuttosto che a specifiche azioni e realizzazioni". Muovendo dall'ultima linea di approfondimento Reichlin si dice d'accordo nel riconoscere che "ciò che dà senso alla nostra vita è necessariamente qualcosa che muove le nostre emozioni e che ci motiva a perseguire certi progetti o a sviluppare certi tratti di carattere". Analogamente Reichlin condivide la mia critica alle "concezioni 'platoniche' che legano il riconoscimento del valore della vita alla manifestazione di una piena coerenza". Reichlin però a proposito di questa mia presa di distanza dalle concezioni che vedono la ricerca del senso della vita come rivolta a realizzare ideali perfezionistici, rileva che essa è eccessiva in quanto suggerisce che queste impostazioni perfezioniste sono sempre "elitarie" e non possano fare propria una prospettiva pluralista. Una conclusione troppo riduzionista a proposito di queste

forme di concezione perfezionistiche del senso della vita che risente del fatto che ad esse mi avvicino ricavando il mio rifiuto più da prospettive epistemologiche generali che da una esperienza concreta di esse. Dato che anche Reichlin non è particolarmente interessato a difendere le concezioni perfezioniste, lascerei da parte questo punto. Anche perché le critiche principali di Reichlin affrontano una questione ben più strutturale, ovvero la pretesa di percorrere un “soggettivismo sul senso della vita come una posizione genuinamente alternativa allo scetticismo e al nichilismo”. Reichlin ritiene che si debba rispondere negativamente alla domanda se una simile posizione possa essere difesa coerentemente e comunque il mio tentativo di dare ad un’elaborazione soggettivistica della ricerca sul senso della vita una qualche forma di oggettività o intersoggettività non è adeguato. In generale secondo Reichlin l’impostazione soggettivista incontrerebbe difficoltà in quanto costretta a rispondere affermativamente a due ben precise questioni : “è vero che la vita di un essere umano non possa essere dotata di significato, per via dei valori che esprime, anche se tale significato non appare soggettivamente a chi la vive? Ed è vero che il fatto di apparire significativa a colui che la vive costituisce una condizione sufficiente perché una vita lo sia effettivamente ?” (presuppongo però che “anche” vada eliminato nel primo interrogativo). Non mi sembra di avere sostenuto – o se l’ho fatto sono stato poco chiaro e me ne scuso – che il riconoscimento soggettivo di avere una vita sensata fosse sufficiente per considerare valido questo riconoscimento: casomai la posizione soggettivistica da me sottoscritta è che tale riconoscimento sia necessario. Il che si collega con la tendenza a sottodimensionare i giudizi esterni di significato di una vita dati da altre persone: per cui in un certo senso nella mia impostazione si finirà con il sostenere che senza un riconoscimento soggettivo una vita non può avere senso. Non basta certo che gli altri mi consolino o cerchino di convincermi di quanto sia importante quello che sto facendo perché io metta da parte quell’emozione per cui la mia vita mi si presenta come tale che non ha ancora espresso quel senso che vorrei provare a darle. Reichlin sostiene però che io diversamente da questa impostazione riconosco un significato di per sé ad una vita rivolta a “ridurre la quantità di sofferenze dell’umanità in generale [...] ad accrescere le libertà , il benessere e la cultura”: che sembrerebbe possedere dunque un valore oggettivo. Poi però contro questa concessione che una vita può avere senso di per sé nella mia ricostruzione vi sarebbe una sottolineatura del fatto che laddove una persona non ritiene la propria vita dotata di significato costui “non possiede in realtà una vita significativa”. Una impostazione che Reichlin non si sente di seguire in quanto per lui è evidente che Van Gogh “ha vissuto una vita significativa, il valore artistico e umano che in essa si è espresso la rende indubbiamente tale”. Reichlin rimarca anche: “il fatto che l’individuo non ne abbia avuto consapevolezza toglie, al fatto che quella vita avesse un significato, il suo influsso positivo in termini di benessere individuale, che esso

generalmente possiede per il soggetto di quella vita; non toglie, però, che quella vita abbia avuto un significato riconoscibile e importante per altri individui”. Reichlin fa la diagnosi che queste mie esitazioni ad usare ‘significato di una vita’ in una direzione oggettivistica che va al di là della consapevolezza delle persone stessa nascerebbero dal timore che una impostazione del genere finirebbe con il fare prevalere una lista predefinita di valori che non tiene conto degli aspetti peculiarmente individuali delle vite umane. Ma egli poi sviluppa una analisi delle idee di J.S.Mill che mostrerebbero come “l’affermazione del valore oggettivo delle occupazioni e degli scopi che coinvolgono le facoltà superiori è perciò perfettamente compatibile con il ruolo della soggettività e della possibilità di sperimentare idee e valori originali”. Il punto è che secondo Reichlin le vite impegnate o nella direzione dei valori morali o, come quella di Gauguin, per valori oggettivi, ossia che contribuiscono in qualche modo al progresso materiale e spirituale dell’umanità “sono significative in quanto sviluppano capacità che sono importanti per “l’umanità che è in noi”. Infine Reichlin critica il mio modo di impostare il rapporto tra la ricerca sul senso della vita e la “dimensione religiosa”. Nel fare questo vengo trascinato dalle “indubbie ragioni che possiedo [...] verso una posizione estrema che risulta invece ingiustificata”. La posizione estrema sarebbe quella che mi porta a scrivere che “solo adottare una concezione atea consentirebbe di fornire delle risposte valide alle domande di senso”. Vi sarebbe qui una contraddizione perché il mio dichiarato soggettivismo dovrebbe portarmi a sospendere il giudizio “su concezioni della vita che non condivido ma che vengono condivise da moltissime altre persone e vengono affermate con piena consapevolezza da chi le fa proprie”. Il punto è che “la critica al carattere alienante e vacuo delle risposte basate sul sentimento religioso si basa su una concezione obsoleta di che cosa sia la fede religiosa”. Nel caso di chi accetta le “religioni storiche e rivelate” non nega questa vita ma “ si affida alla rivelazione di Dio individuandone la ragione ultima – e, a suo giudizio , più profonda – per amare questo mondo e le sue creature e trovare in questo un senso per la sua vita. Chi non condivide questa fede può senza dubbio fare altrettanto sulla base di ragioni diverse. Certamente il credente non è giustificato nel rivendicare il monopolio di una vita sensata e meritevole di essere vissuta , lo stesso tuttavia vale per il non credente”. Mi sembra che entrambe le questioni che Reichlin solleva si confrontino con la difficoltà a cogliere nel mio libro – un punto come ho riconosciuto implicitamente risolto ma che avrebbe richiesto qualche dichiarazione esplicita in più – la diversità tra il piano di analisi meta rivolto a caratterizzare la pratica della ricerca sul senso della vita (forse il livello di analisi dedicato alla meta-significanza) e il piano normativo impegnato a cercare di delineare soluzioni a proposito della domanda su che cosa potrebbe dare un senso ad una vita umana . È chiaro che la mia squalificazione di una vita religiosa come sensata è di natura normativa, non sto dicendo che non sia un modo prima facie significativo di impostare la ricerca sul

senso della vita. Sto però sottoscrivendo con decisione sul piano prescrittivo la tesi che dato che la fede è incompatibile con i fatti una risposta apprezzabile alla ricerca sul senso della propria vita – sia per quanto riguarda il passato sia per quello che riguarda il tempo che ci resta da vivere – non potrà essere data perdendo di vista la reale situazione in cui viviamo (sulla incompatibilità tra fede e fatti condivido dunque l'impostazione di Jerry A.Coyne , *O scienza o religione. Perché la fede è incompatibile con i fatti*, Roma , Nessun Dogma , 2016). Mentre l'insistenza sulla impossibilità di riconoscere una vita sensata laddove la stessa persona individuale non la riconosca come tale fa parte dell'articolazione meta del mio discorso. Così come fa parte della dimensione meta il riconoscimento che possono esserci vari modi di rispondere alla domanda su che cosa dia senso alla propria vita. Solo uno di questi modi è però quello che da me – sulla base di una qualche consapevolezza dei miei desideri e passioni – viene sottoscritto e proposto all'altrui riflessione per vedere se viene accolta o meno questa pretesa. Una pretesa molto circostanziata che riguarda la mia vita e non già quella dell'essere umano in generale. Quale vita sia più dotata di senso è forse una comparazione che non andrebbe mai fatta, certo nessuna risposta soddisfacente è disponibile. Possiamo limitarci ad argomentare a sostegno della sensatezza della vita che stiamo conducendo . Si tratta di un confronto sempre aperto con coloro che ci presteranno attenzione. Non potremo risolverlo cercando nel passato un qualche testo che lo abbia deciso per noi. Nè potremo risolverlo facendo appello ad una nostra speciale capacità di discriminare, tra le molte possibili, la sola risposta realmente e definitivamente accettabile.

V a r i a

ROBOT KILLER. LA RIVOLUZIONE ROBOTICA NELLA GUERRA E LE QUESTIONI MORALI

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ABSTRACT

Almost all of the robotic weapons used today in war or in military missions require a human operator to make key decisions: they are unmanned systems. The lethal autonomous weapons systems (the so-called killer robots) are weapons programmed to autonomously select their target and decide whether or not to attack without any meaningful human intervention. These lethal autonomous weapons do not yet exist, but the technological developments could afford to produce them incredibly quickly. We describe the main objections advanced against the development and use of these weapons: issues of compliance with international humanitarian law, problems of accountability for fully autonomous weapons, lack of human emotions and empathy, deskilling of the military profession and destabilization of the traditional norms of military virtue and reduction of the war to murder. Behind the most part of these objections to the lethal weapons systems there is the fear that, because of using them, we could irremediably lose our humanity. According to the critics of robot killers, i.e., these are machines whose use in battlefield crosses a fundamental moral line, that we should not overcome if we are still interested in beings humans. We show that these concerns are not justified, because killer robots represent only the last effort of human beings to produce, through technology, tools with which to fight and defeat the enemy.

KEYWORDS

Robot, killing, military ethics, human integrity

1. INTRODUZIONE

Negli ultimi anni le forze militari impegnate in operazioni di guerra o di difesa del territorio hanno fatto sempre più ricorso a macchine comandate a distanza – veicoli

terrestri, aeronautici e navali – e progettate per eseguire attività finora compiute dagli umani. Alcuni eserciti dispongono ormai di droni che, in risposta a particolari segnali, sono in grado di sostituirsi ai soldati in operazioni che vanno dalla localizzazione e neutralizzazione di materiale esplosivo improvvisato (*improvised explosive devices, IED*) al riconoscimento di persone sospettate di terrorismo o ricercate (*persons of interest*), dalla perlustrazione del territorio al bombardamento ed all’uccisione mirata. Le stesse macchine che possono essere usate a distanza per monitorare le zone a rischio, possono essere impiegate, con alcune leggere modifiche, per combattere il nemico. Il centro di comando dei veicoli può trovarsi in prossimità delle operazioni ma anche – soprattutto quando vengono utilizzati mezzi aerei o navali – a centinaia e, sempre più spesso, a migliaia di chilometri di distanza dall’aerea interessata dall’intervento. Sono *unmanned systems* – ovvero macchine che non prevedono il pilota a bordo – ed il loro numero nelle aree di guerra e di intervento aumenta ogni anno.¹ Come conseguenza della crescita della richiesta vengono immessi sul mercato prototipi sempre più sofisticati che possono essere utilizzati con successo non soltanto in guerre convenzionali ma anche in situazioni di guerriglia o di rivolta urbana. Incomincia, poi, a profilarsi all’orizzonte una nuova generazione di macchine. Anche se, infatti, è sempre difficile prevedere con sufficiente precisione il futuro, la tendenza nella ricerca militare sembra andare nella direzione della progettazione di congegni che – a differenza delle macchine attuali – non necessiteranno più, nel corso della missione, del controllo e delle decisioni umane: «In un primo momento si tratta di passare ad una “autonomia supervisionata”, ma, a lungo termine, si mira – come sottolinea Grégoire Chamayou – all’autonomia totale».² Alcune macchine con queste capacità sono già impiegate in programmi di difesa: l’*Iron Dome* israeliano e il *Phalanx Close-In_Weapons System* americano³, ad esempio, sono progettati per identificare minacce come missili e razzi e rispondere automaticamente. Il robot sentinella (*Sentry robot*), *SGR-AI⁴*, è, invece, usato dalla Corea del Nord nella zona demilitarizzata per identificare e colpire persone non autorizzate. Dispone di un sensore per la rivelazione e una telecamera a infrarossi che permette di monitorare bersagli a una distanza di alcune miglia sia di giorno e che di notte. Una volta rilevata la presenza del nemico la macchina invia un

¹ Robert Sparrow, *Predators or Plowshares? Arms Control of Robotic Weapons*, in “IEEE Technology and Society” 28. 1, 2009, pp. 25-29.

² G. Chamayou, *Teoria del drone. Principi filosofici del diritto di uccidere*, DeriveApprodi, Roma 2014, p. 201.

³ Human Rights Watch and IHRC, *Losing of Humanity. The case against Killer Robots*, IHRC, 2012, p. 9. Consultabile in https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/arms1112ForUpload_0_0.pdf

⁴ Installati nel 2010 lungo la zona demilitarizzata DMZ19, «sono dotati di sensori di calore e di movimento ed attraverso tali fonti possono percepire persone e mezzi nel raggio di 2 miglia e decidere, dietro un comando umano, ogni azione conseguenziale». J. Carlos Rossi, *La guerra che verrà: le armi autonome*, Sistema informativo a schede, novembre 2016, mensile dell’Istituto di Ricerche Internazionali Archivio Disarmo (IRIAD) p. 10.

avvertimento al centro di comando che decide se dare alla macchina l'autorizzazione a colpire il bersaglio. Anche se, però, al momento il sistema è autonomo soltanto per le funzioni di sorveglianza, è già prevista una modalità automatica anche per l'impiego della forza. Il *Taranis*, inglese, e l'americano *X-47B* sono, invece, due sistemi aerei, in una fase avanzata di progettazione, che prevedono, in missione, un controllo umano minimo e la capacità di operare, in modo autonomo, anche in un altro continente.⁵ Siamo certamente ancora molto lontani dalla completa automazione delle forze armate e, tuttavia, i cambiamenti importanti che stanno avvenendo nelle tecnologie militari lasciano pensare che potrebbe arrivare il giorno in cui gli esseri umani combatteranno le guerre attraverso sistemi intelligenti – modello *Terminator*⁶ – in grado, una volta progettate, di confrontarsi con il nemico senza bisogno di essere telecomandate. Secondo le previsioni di alcuni esperti militari e di robotica, del resto, queste armi – conosciute anche con il nome di robot killer o di *lethal autonomous weapons systems* (LAWs) – potrebbero essere sviluppate nel giro dei prossimi trent'anni. Per costruirle è necessario l'inserimento iniziale di dati da parte dell'operatore. Ma, poi, queste macchine – quale che sia il loro compito – hanno la «capacità di funzionare, identificare e avvicinarsi all'obiettivo in maniera completamente indipendente, senza cioè essere programmati per gestire una minaccia specifica».⁷

Lo sviluppo di tecnologie di questo tipo e la conseguente esclusione dei soldati dalle zone di guerra rappresenterebbe una vera rivoluzione in ambito militare. I vantaggi dell'impiego di queste macchine sarebbero soprattutto a livello operativo, in quanto, a differenza dei droni, i sistemi intelligenti autonomi non sarebbero vulnerabili al cattivo funzionamento o al sabotaggio delle comunicazioni satellitari.⁸ Inoltre, l'impiego di veicoli aerei senza pilota (*Unmanned Aerial Vehicles-UAVs*) richiede la trasmissione di una grande quantità di dati attraverso il sistema radio e satellitare: e questo «pone un limite al numero di UAVs che possono essere messi in campo allo stesso tempo in un dato teatro di operazioni»⁹ e consente il loro impiego soltanto a quegli stati che sono dotati di un sistema di comunicazione operativo satellitare. Anche in considerazione della loro capacità di elaborazione dei dati

⁵ Human Rights Watch and IHRC, *Losing of Humanity*, 2012, p. 15; J. Carlos Rossi, *La guerra che verrà: le armi autonome*, cit., p. 11.

⁶ Terminator è un film di fantascienza del 1984 diretto da James Cameron, scritto da Cameron e prodotto da Gale Anne Hurd. Il protagonista, Terminator, è un cyborg assassino dalle fattezze umane programmato per uccidere [https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terminator_\(film\)](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terminator_(film)).

⁷ S. Bacchi, *I droni arma del futuro?*, in "Sistema informativo a schede", 5, 2014, pp. 1-54.

⁸ K. Anderson, M.C. Waxman, *Law and Ethics for Autonomous Weapon Systems: Why a Ban Won't Work and How the Laws of War Can*, Hoover Institution, Jean Perkins Task Force on National Security and Law Essay Series (http://media.hoover.org/sites/default/files/documents/Anderson-Waxman_LawAndEthics_r2_FINAL.pdf), 2013, pp. 1-32, in particolare p. 7.

⁹ R. Sparrow, *Robots and Respect: Assessing the Case Against Autonomous Weapon Systems*, in "Ethics & International Affairs", 30, no.1, 2016, pp. 93-116, in particolare p. 96.

raccolti, essi, poi, potrebbero essere in grado di rispondere alle minacce più velocemente dei soldati e dare quindi un vantaggio militare non indifferente a chi può usarle. Una battaglia o una guerra potrebbero essere decise dal fatto che si dispone della tecnologia più sofisticata e complessa per rispondere prontamente all'attacco nemico. Infine, con l'impiego di robot combattenti al posto dei contingenti tradizionali, chi sceglie la carriera militare correrebbe meno il rischio di essere ucciso. In altri termini, la società sarebbe molto più protetta dalle conseguenze dei conflitti. Nel corso della guerra, i robot combattenti possono essere danneggiati o distrutti, ma non ci sarebbe quella perdita di vite umane con cui oggi dobbiamo fare i conti. Ma ci sono anche ragioni di tipo economico che giustificano l'uso dei robot killer: da un punto di vista economico come i droni sono più vantaggiosi dei mezzi pilotati, così i *lethal autonomous weapons* sembrano preferibili ai droni pilotati a distanza.

Anche se l'uso dei robot killer appare una soluzione vantaggiosa, sotto diversi punti di vista, numerose organizzazioni non governative hanno lanciato recentemente una campagna per chiedere una moratoria permanente all'impiego di queste macchine.¹⁰ Nei confronti di queste tecnologie vengono avanzate alcune obiezioni di principio che mettono in evidenza una serie di questioni che meritano di essere discusse prima di poter esprimere una valutazione veramente appropriata su questo tema. Noi crediamo che alcune preoccupazioni vadano considerate ed esaminate attentamente, ma, allo stesso tempo, vogliamo mettere in guardia da un modo di affrontare i problemi che tende a contrapporre lo sviluppo tecnologico alla nostra umanità. In molte aree di riflessione il progresso scientifico e le nuove applicazioni tecnologiche vengono spesso presentate come una grave minaccia per la nostra natura. Ma anche nel dibattito sulle macchine intelligenti impiegabili in ambito militare, i maggiori timori nascono da un modo di concepire il rapporto degli esseri umani con le tecnologie che sembra non percepire la natura ibrida della nostra umanità. Si dimentica, cioè, che la nostra umanità non si costruisce in contrapposizione alla tecnica, ma proprio attraverso gli strumenti che creiamo ed utilizziamo. Con questo nostro contributo, pertanto, intendiamo richiamare l'attenzione su quest'errore e proporre di affrontare le complesse ed importanti questioni dell'automazione in ambito militare da una prospettiva completamente diversa. Dobbiamo non soltanto considerare gli elementi di continuità che legano lo

¹⁰ La Campagna *Stop Killer Robot* è stata lanciata tra l'ottobre 2012 e l'aprile 2013 dalle seguenti associazioni non governative: Human Rights Watch; Article 36; Association for Aid and Relief Japan; International Committee for Robot Arms Control; Mines Action Canada; Nobel Women's Initiative; PAX (già IKV Pax Christi); Pugwash Conferences on Science & World Affairs; Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. G. Veruggio, *Robietica: focus sulle problematiche civili e militari dei droni*, in "Mondo digitale", settembre 2015, p. 14. Anche importanti nomi hanno sostenuto questa Campagna: Daniel Victor, *Elon Musk and Stephen Hawking Among Hundreds to Urge Ban on Military Robots*, N.Y. TIMES (July 27, 2015), <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/28/technology/elon-musk-and-stephen-hawking-among-hundreds-to-urge-ban-on-militaryrobots.html>.

sviluppo delle macchine autonome letali con gli armamenti che finora abbiamo prodotto. Ma anche vedere nei robot killer l'ultimo sforzo degli esseri umani di servirsi della tecnologia per produrre strumenti con i quali affrontare i nemici e vincerli. Procederemo, comunque, presentando innanzi tutto i principali argomenti avanzati da coloro che sostengono l'inaccettabilità morale dei robot combattenti o killer. Nell'ultimo paragrafo, poi, discuteremo i loro presupposti per mostrare che non esiste alcuna incompatibilità di principio tra queste nuove tecnologie e la nostra umanità.

Corre d'obbligo precisare che con questa riflessione non vogliamo sostenere l'inevitabilità della guerra o affermare che la violenza sia l'unico modo per risolvere i conflitti che si presentano a livello internazionale con il crescere della globalizzazione. Anche noi crediamo che il ricorso alla forza dovrebbe essere sempre il rimedio più estremo a cui ricorre, a malincuore, quando altre soluzioni hanno fallito. Non dovremmo, poi, mai dimenticare che le guerre colpiscono soprattutto le popolazioni civili che, il più delle volte, sono le vittime principali di quelle situazioni di ingiustizia a cui si vuole porre rimedio quando, alla fine, si decide di usare la violenza. Si può, comunque, anche avere una posizione critica nei confronti della guerra e, tuttavia, ritenere doveroso continuare una riflessione sulla capacità delle nuove tecnologie di rendere la guerra, almeno finché verrà combattuta, più accettabile. Non crediamo che un arma, solamente perché più tecnologica ed elaborata, debba per forza essere meno compatibile con la moralità di quelle finora utilizzate.

2. LE OBIEZIONI ALLO SVILUPPO E ALL'IMPIEGO DEI ROBOT KILLER

Se consideriamo la tendenza all'automazione attualmente in corso in ambito militare, potrebbe accadere che in futuro i soldati vengano sempre più rimpiazzati da robot killer.¹¹ Un robot o automa killer è una macchina in grado di selezionare un obiettivo e decidere autonomamente, senza bisogno di ricevere ordini da un essere umano, se far fuoco. Come, cioè, qualsiasi altra macchina o autonoma impiegato attualmente in guerra è il risultato di un progetto umano e il prodotto dello sviluppo tecnologico. Tuttavia, a differenza dei droni comandati a distanza attraverso segnali radio o fibra ottica, il robot killer, una volta progettato e attivato, può agire in maniera completamente indipendente, senza attendere la valutazione e, quindi, la decisione umana. Anche se lo sviluppo di queste macchine o robot intelligenti

¹¹ A. Krishnan, *Killer Robots. Legality and Ethicality of Autonomous Weapons*, Ashgate, Farnham 2009, pp. 57-59.

potrebbe essere estremamente vantaggioso per i contingenti militari impegnati in operazione di guerra, contro il loro impiego sono state espresse recentemente riserve importanti. Alcune organizzazioni hanno anche lanciato una campagna di sensibilizzazione, chiedendo la ratifica, a livello internazionale, di un trattato che ne proibisca esplicitamente l'uso. Gli autori di questa iniziativa non sostengono che l'uso della forza sia, di per sé, ingiustificato, ma ritengono che l'impiego di queste nuove tecnologie sarebbe comunque inaccettabile, in quanto metterebbe a rischio la nostra umanità.¹²

L'impiego dei robot killer sarebbe incompatibile con le norme del diritto internazionale che esigono il rispetto delle regole di discriminazione e di proporzionalità

La maggiore preoccupazione è che l'impiego dei robot killer sia incompatibile con le norme di diritto internazionale umanitario che esigono dai combattenti il rispetto, nelle operazioni di guerra, delle regole di discriminazione e di proporzionalità.¹³ A prescindere, infatti, dallo sviluppo tecnologico, queste armi tecnologiche, non sarebbero mai in grado di distinguere correttamente tra combattenti e civili e, quindi, tra bersagli leciti e bersagli, invece, non leciti (*lawful and unlawful target*), in quanto questa capacità dipende da abilità che solo gli esseri umani avrebbero.¹⁴ Per distinguere, cioè, un combattente da un civile o da un soldato ferito, o che si arrende, non sarebbero sufficienti le capacità sensorie e di elaborazione dei dati. Serve la capacità di cogliere l'intenzione¹⁵, «che implica interpretare sottili indizi, che dipendono dal contesto, come il tono della voce, le espressioni facciali, o il linguaggio del corpo. Gli umani possiedono la capacità unica di identificarsi con altri esseri umani e sono così meglio equipaggiati per comprendere le sfumature di comportamenti imprevedibili in modi che le macchine (...) non possono

¹² A. Lombardi, *Gli scienziati: basta robot-killer, umanità a rischio*, in "La Repubblica", 29 luglio 2015, p. 30.

¹³ T. Hurka, *Proportionality in the Morality of War*, in "Philosophy & Public Affairs", 33 (1), 2005, pp. 34-66.

¹⁴ Pax, *Deadly Decisions. 8 Objections to Killer Robots*, Netherlands 2014, p. 12. Vedi anche Pax, *Does Unmanned Make Unacceptable? Exploring the Debate on Using Drones and Robot in Warfare*, Netherlands 2011.

¹⁵ M. Guarini, P. Bello, *Robotic Warfare: Some Challenges in Moving from Noncivilian to Civilian Theaters*, in P. Lin, K. Abney, G.A. Bekey (a cura di), *Robot Ethics: The Ethical and Social Implications of Robotics*, Cambridge, Mass. MIT Press, 2012, pp. 129-144.

raggiungere». ¹⁶ Un computer, invece, anche se intelligente, guarderebbe comunque una donna di ottant'anni sulla sedia a rotelle allo stesso modo in cui guarda un carro armato. ¹⁷ E sarebbe ancora meno capace di distinguere tra un soldato combattente nemico da un civile che porta una pistola per difesa personale o da un militare delle forze di peacekeeping schierate a tutela del rispetto degli accordi di pace tra le parti in causa. Un bambino, poi, che gioca su un carro armato abbandonato potrebbe essere scambiato da un robot killer per un soldato impegnato nella riparazione del suo veicolo. ¹⁸ È vero, poi, che i civili non sono presenti in ogni campo di battaglia. Tuttavia, non sarebbe possibile limitare l'uso dei robot killer a queste situazioni (come mostra l'uso ripetuto delle «bombe a grappolo» nelle aree popolate) ed, ad ogni modo, anche in questi casi queste macchine non potrebbero mai raggiungere quella capacità di valutazione che si richiede a chi è coinvolto in operazioni di guerra. ¹⁹ Esse non soltanto non sarebbero in grado di stabilire se l'attacco è veramente necessario, ma non saprebbero nemmeno riconoscere un soldato che si arrende e, violando la Convenzione di Ginevra, continuerebbero a considerarlo un combattente. ²⁰

Inoltre, chi si oppone allo sviluppo e all'impiego di queste macchine aggiunge che per i robot killer sarebbe impossibile operare un bilanciamento sufficientemente ragionevole tra le esigenze militari e la necessità di ridurre i danni per la popolazione civile. In altri termini, queste macchine sarebbero incapaci di seguire un criterio di proporzionalità, in quanto è immaginabile che le diverse situazioni che incontreranno presenteranno una complessità molto maggiore di quella prevista dai loro programmatori. Nelle operazioni di guerra, cioè, i robot killer dovrebbero valutare non soltanto la legittimità del bersaglio, ma anche le possibili conseguenze dell'attacco e la possibilità di conseguire lo stesso risultato con alternative meno distruttive. ²¹ Tuttavia, proprio a causa del fatto che il vantaggio militare deve essere misurato caso per caso, «non è chiaro come un programmatore potrebbe tener conto, in anticipo, delle infinite varietà di contingenze inaspettate che possono presentarsi (...). è improbabile che un programmatore o un fabbricante sarebbe capace di prevedere tutte le condizioni che potrebbero influenzare la performance della

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch and IHRC, *Losing Humanity. The Case against Killer Robots*, USA 2014, p. 5. Vedi anche di Human Rights Watch and IHRC, *Losing Humanity. The Case against Killer Robots*, USA 2012.

¹⁷ *Interview with Peter W. Singer*, in "International Review of the Red Cross", 94, 886, 2012, p. 476.

¹⁸ R. Sparrow, *Robots and Respect: Assessing the Case Against Autonomous Weapon Systems*, cit., p. 98.

¹⁹ International Committee of the Red Cross, *International Humanitarian Law and the Challenges of Contemporary Armed Conflicts*, 2011.

²⁰ Convenzione di Ginevra, Protocollo addizionale I, articolo 57.

²¹ R. Sparrow, *Robots and Respect: Assessing the Case Against Autonomous Weapon Systems*, cit., p. 99.

macchina». ²² Se, cioè, è già difficile per un soldato che opera in uno scenario di guerra bilanciare i vantaggi militari con la sofferenza umana che può produrre, non possiamo aspettarci che una macchina sia in grado di rispettare la regola di proporzionalità. ²³ «(...) sarebbe difficile ricreare nelle macchine il tipo di giudizio richiesto nel decidere come pesare il danno civile e il vantaggio militare in situazioni impreviste. (...) valutare la proporzionalità richiede “un giudizio propriamente umano”». ²⁴ Anche per questa ragione, pertanto, l’impiego di macchine completamente autonome violerebbe la clausola di Martens che impone alle parti impegnate in un conflitto armato di rispettare i dettami della coscienza dell’etica pubblica. E questo significa che il loro uso in guerra sarebbe illegittimo anche da un punto di vista giuridico, in quanto, in assenza di specifiche previsioni da parte del diritto internazionale, una nuova tecnologia che non rispetta questo standard è *unlawful*.

Non sarebbe possibile identificare un responsabile dei crimini dei robot killer

Per altro, nel caso in cui i robot killer causino sofferenze ingiustificate al nemico o alla popolazione civile, non discriminando adeguatamente il bersaglio legittimo oppure puntando il fuoco su un obiettivo che nessuno ha ordinato di attaccare ²⁵, non potremmo in alcun modo attribuire la colpa dell’accaduto alla macchina, né avrebbe senso spegnerla per punirla per le conseguenze che ha prodotto. ²⁶ Potremmo attribuire la responsabilità al programmatore, ma i robot killer non sono progettati da un’unica persona, in quanto funzionano attraverso milioni di linee di codice scritti da più individui, nessuno dei quali conosce l’intero programma. Ci sono, inoltre, i tecnici che assemblano le diverse parti materiali della macchine e quelli che lavorano insieme da differenti luoghi per fare in modo che, al momento del loro impiego, esse abbiano la giusta connessione con i sistemi satellitari e con i comandi. Possono essere, cioè, molteplici le ragioni per cui queste armi funzionano male. Il comandante poi non può essere responsabile per le reazioni di macchine autonome. ²⁷ Pertanto, la difficoltà di identificare un responsabile per gli eventuali crimini compiuti dalle

²² Human Rights Watch and IHRC, *Losing Humanity. The Case against Killer Robots*, 2014, p. 6.

²³ Pax, *Deadly Decisions. 8 Objections to Killer Robots*, Netherlands 2014, p. 15.

²⁴ Human Rights Watch and IHRC, *Losing Humanity. The Case against Killer Robots*, 2014, p. 8; Noel E. Sharkey, *The Evitability of Autonomous Robot Warfare*, in “International Review of the Red Cross” 94, no. 886, 2012, pp. 787-799, in particolare pp. 789.

²⁵ Pax, *Deadly Decisions. 8 Objections to Killer Robots*, Netherlands 2014, p. 16.

²⁶ N. Sharkey, *Saying No to Lethal Autonomous Targeting*, in “Journal of Military Ethics, 9, 4, 2010, pp. 369-383, in particolare p. 380. Vedi anche R. Sparrow, *Killer Robots*, in “Journal of Applied Philosophy”, 24, 1, 2007, pp. 62-77.

²⁷ Pax, *Deadly Decisions. 8 Objections to Killer Robots*, Netherlands 2014, p. 18.

macchine killer farebbe aumentare ancora di più il rischio di abusi. Non ci sarebbe nessuno, infatti, che potrebbe essere veramente interessato a prevenire il loro possibile cattivo funzionamento o che sarebbe scoraggiato dall'usarle prima che, ammesso che questo sia possibile, venga accertata la loro sicurezza. Al contrario, proprio la certezza dell'impunità potrebbe spingere i comandanti militari ad impiegarle in battaglia, malgrado le vittime civili che produrranno.

I robot killer non sarebbero in grado di agire come umani

Il timore, inoltre, è che con l'uso dei robot killer la guerra perda ogni umanità, in quanto, a prescindere dalla loro intelligenza, essi non sarebbero capaci di agire come umani. Del resto, lo sviluppo di queste macchine intelligenti trasformerebbe radicalmente lo scenario della guerra che fino ad oggi ha caratterizzato la storia umana. Prima, infatti, avevamo essere umani che combattevano senza usare le macchine. Poi abbiamo avuto esseri umani che si facevano guerra con le macchine e, alla fine, siamo di fronte ad un'era in cui le macchine potrebbero combattere senza umani.²⁸ Tuttavia, la rinuncia del monopolio della violenza a vantaggio delle macchine renderebbe i conflitti armati qualcosa di profondamente aberrante e disumano²⁹, in quanto i robot killer non possono provare alcuna compassione per il nemico. Lo sviluppo di combattenti che mancano di sentimenti può essere considerato qualcosa di desiderabile sia dal punto di vista militare che umanitario. Alle volte, infatti, emozioni come la paura, la rabbia e il dolore possono influenzare negativamente la valutazione del soldato e spingerlo a compiere atti di crudeltà sul nemico. Va considerato, però, che nella maggior parte dei casi sono proprio le emozioni che garantiscono alle popolazioni civili e al nemico la migliore protezione, in quanto esse inibiscono nel soldato la tentazione di uccidere senza necessità e diritto. È, del resto, proprio l'avversione che gli esseri umani provano per l'uccidere che può spingere i soldati a disertare per non dover obbedire a ordini disumani e crudeli o a ribellarsi quando viene chiesto loro di fare fuoco sui propri concittadini disarmati.³⁰ Cancelliamo, pertanto, dalla guerra le emozioni, usando i robot, e la conseguenza sarà inevitabilmente una riduzione delle resistenze psicologiche ad uccidere: la guerra sarebbe molto più efficiente ma non ci sarebbe più un limite alla violenza.³¹ In altri termini, l'automazione priverebbe la guerra di qualsiasi moralità, in quanto i combattenti non avrebbero più alcuna percezione della gravità delle proprie azioni e potrebbero essere impiegati, senza difficoltà, per le atrocità più

²⁸ Pax, *Deadly Decisions. 8 Objections to Killer Robots*, Netherlands 2014, p. 1.

²⁹ P.W. Singer, *Wired for War*, Penguin Press, New York 2009, p. 194.

³⁰ Pax, *Deadly Decisions. 8 Objections to Killer Robots*, Netherlands 2014, p. 7.

³¹ Human Rights Watch and IHRC, *Losing Humanity. The Case against Killer Robots*, 2014, p. 11.

impensabili. I robot killer, perciò, «sono per lo natura non etici. La guerra ha a che fare con la sofferenze umana, la perdita di vite umane e le conseguenze per gli esseri umani. Uccidere con le macchine è l'ultimo stadio di *demoralizzazione* della guerra. Anche nell'inferno della guerra noi troviamo l'umanità, e questo deve rimanere così». ³²

Sarebbe più difficile resistere alla tentazione della guerra

A conferma, poi, del degrado morale che verrebbe prodotto dall'impiego dei robot killer c'è anche il fatto che sarebbe più difficile resistere alla tentazione della guerra. La guerra rappresenta ancora un problema morale perché comporta il rischio di sofferenza e di morte non soltanto per noi, ma anche per le persone che amiamo e che conosciamo e che, a causa della guerra, rischiamo di perdere e di non rivedere più. Nel momento in cui i conflitti armati vedranno come protagonisti i robot avremo meno remore a chiedere che venga usata la forza per risolvere i problemi e le difficoltà che potranno presentarsi, a livello internazionale, con altre popolazioni o gruppi. La società civile, cioè, rischia di diventare uno spettatore passivo della guerra, in quanto il rischio di essere direttamente coinvolta in essa sarà sempre meno significativo: «Le guerre in Vietnam e in Iraq hanno dimostrato questo punto. I LAWs rimuovono significativamente gli ostacoli politici e abbassano le resistenze per le autorità di dichiarare ed entrare guerra. Non solo sarà più facile per un governo entrare in guerra, ma anche rimanere in guerra o compiere azioni segrete di guerra. Se il costo per le proprie truppe è più basso può anche optare per un'estensione della guerra». ³³ Con il moltiplicarsi delle guerre, aumenterebbero, poi, i costi per gli esseri umani. Innanzi tutto, le guerre non verrebbero combattute soltanto tra macchine intelligenti, in quanto la supremazia tecnologica potrebbe essere utilizzata anche contro combattenti umani e colpire, come effetto collaterale, anche le popolazioni civili. Il rischio di abuso della forza nei confronti del nemico e delle popolazioni sarebbe, inoltre, molto alto, perché sarebbe difficile per noi seguire ciò che i robot fanno. Fino a quando, infatti, la guerra viene combattuta dai soldati umani noi possiamo rivivere attraverso le loro narrazioni quello hanno vissuto in prima persona. Ma se la guerra è fatta da macchine noi rischiamo di non sapere quello che succede in guerra. Esse possono aver compiuto operazioni di cui ignoriamo completamente l'esistenza. Inoltre, le stesse popolazioni che mandano in guerra i robot killer rischiano di pagare le spese del conflitto sia in termini di ritorsioni da parte del nemico che di conseguenze sociali collegabili ad un'erosione del potere popolare. Del resto, con l'introduzione dei robot killer, è prevedibile che vengano

³² Pax, *Deadly Decisions. 8 Objections to Killer Robots*, Netherlands 2014, p. 7.

³³ Pax, *Losing Humanity. The Case against Killer Robots*, 2014, p. 9.

chieste dai cittadini meno ragioni per entrare in guerra e che, più in generale, la questione relativa alla decisione di incominciarla interesserà poco o per niente all'opinione pubblica. In questo modo, per l'assenza di meccanismi politici partecipati per controllare il governo, le nostre società liberali potrebbe trasformarsi in oligarchie. «I mezzi che usiamo in guerra modificano il paesaggio sociale. Le armi robotiche autonome sono uno strumento di questo tipo, a parte che richiedono soltanto a pochissime persone di andare in guerra, esse rischiano di accentrare il potere in poche mani».³⁴

La guerra diventerebbe un'esecuzione in quanto il nemico non avrebbe la possibilità di difendersi

Un segno, infine, non meno importante della disumanizzazione che verrebbe prodotta dall'impiego dei robot killer emergerebbe quando consideriamo l'arte della guerra. Il diritto di uccidere in guerra sarebbe legato alla possibilità di essere ucciso. In questo modo l'uso di robot killer stravolgerebbe completamente il codice etico militare in quanto i robot killer (e, di conseguenza, attraverso di loro un particolare schieramento) potrebbe uccidere il nemico senza correre alcun rischio di essere uccisi. Non soltanto, poi, l'uccisione in guerra assomiglierebbe molto di più a un'esecuzione che ad uno scontro dove gli avversari hanno la stessa possibilità di uccidere, ma la virtù del soldato sarebbe anche corrotta e perderebbe di qualsiasi significato. Il coraggio, ad esempio, verrebbe sostituito dalla paura di esporsi alla minaccia nemica e dall'idea che possa essere giusto combattere in una situazione di sicurezza.³⁵ Si passa così da un'etica del sacrificio a un'etica dell'autoconservazione e della vigliaccheria che non ha più niente a che fare con le virtù guerriere di un tempo³⁶: «In questo grande movimento d'inversione dei valori si mette in soffitta quello che un tempo si adorava e si cantano le lodi di quello che solo ieri si diceva di disprezzare. Quel che si chiamava vigliaccheria diventa coraggio, quel che si chiamava assassinio diventa battaglia, quel che si chiamava spirito di sacrificio, diventato privilegio di un nemico condannato a morte certa, si converte in oggetto di disgusto. La bassezza deve diventare grandezza: (...) più che a uno spettacolo di

³⁴ Pax, *Losing Humanity. The Case against Killer Robots*, 2014, p. 10.

³⁵ R. Sparrow, *War without Virtue?*, in B.J. Strawser (ed.), *Killing by Remote Control*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York 2013, pp. 84-105.

³⁶ S. Amato, *Neuroscienze e utilizzazione militare delle tecniche di potenziamento umano*, in "Etica & Politica", XVI, 2014, 2, pp. 182-198, in particolare p. 185.

“guerra senza virtù” assistiamo a una vasta operazione di ridefinizione delle virtù guerriere». ³⁷

3. I ROBOT KILLER E IL NUOVO MODO DI FARE LA GUERRA

Lo sviluppo delle tecnologie robotiche e la loro applicazione in ambito militare solleva molte questioni che meritano di essere approfondite e discusse a livello pubblico. ³⁸ È giusto precisare subito che si tratta di questioni importanti che non abbiamo la presunzione di poter affrontare e risolvere nello spazio delle prossime pagine. Considerata la complessità dell’argomento il nostro obiettivo è molto più modesto. Intendiamo soltanto mostrare che una riflessione appropriata sui *lethal autonomous weapons systems* dovrà essere capace di mettere da parte la convinzione – come abbiamo visto ancora molto radicata tra i critici delle nuove tecnologie in ambito militare – che le nuove armi autonome siano incompatibili con la nostra umanità. Speriamo in questo modo di contribuire ad avviare una nuova discussione sui robot killer che sappia confrontarsi con i più recenti sviluppi tecnologici in ambito militare senza quei pregiudizi che caratterizzano ancora ampiamente l’attuale dibattito. Ci sono momenti nel corso della storia in cui cambiano non soltanto le strategie militari, ma anche, a causa dell’introduzione di nuove armi, i modi di fare la guerra. Secondo gli storici, del resto, se consideriamo soltanto il periodo che va dal 1300 ad oggi, potremmo identificare almeno una decina di rivoluzioni nell’arte della guerra. In questi casi le nuove armi che vengono introdotte rendono obsolete quelle precedenti, creando, in questo modo, un nuovo modello di combattimento e di guerra. ³⁹ Con il lento ma inesorabile sviluppo delle macchine autonome siamo vicini ad un’altra rivoluzione degli armamenti e la più importante dallo sviluppo della bomba atomica. Quando queste trasformazioni accadono è naturale pensare che l’ultimo cambiamento sarà, con molta probabilità, quello che modificherà, in maniera definitiva, non soltanto la natura della guerra ma anche l’identità dei combattenti: «ogni volta, queste rivoluzioni negli affari militari vengono percepite come ‘un’improvvisa tempesta che getta tutto sottosopra’. Questo è come un uomo politico italiano del 15° secolo descrive la sensazione che provava a guardare un cannone abbattere facilmente le mura del castello che aveva protetto la sua città per

³⁷ G. Chamayou, *Teoria del drone. Principi filosofici del diritto di uccidere*, cit., p. 95.

³⁸ A. Leveringhaus, *Ethics and Autonomous Weapons*, Palgrave, London 2016, in particolare pp. 1-30; A. Krishnan, *Killer Robots. Legality and Ethicality of Autonomous Weapons*, cit., pp. 117-144.

³⁹ Robert Sparrow, *Robotic Weapons and the Future of War*, in J. Wolfendale and P. Tripodi (Eds), *New Wars and New Soldiers: Military Ethics in the Contemporary World*, Ashgate, Surrey (UK) & Burlington (VA), 2011, pp. 117-133.

secoli».⁴⁰ Allo stesso tempo, a causa della loro novità e per il fatto che rimodellano il nostro orizzonte, le nuove tecnologie suscitano spesso reazioni e passioni incontenibili e contrastanti. Questo è evidente se pensiamo agli ambiti della medicina e della cura in cui l'affermarsi delle biotecnologie è al centro di un acceso e partecipato dibattito bioetico. Ma vale anche per l'ambito militare e per lo sviluppo dei nuovi armamenti. Da una parte tendiamo a sopravvalutare i benefici che queste nuove tecnologie produrranno; dall'altra, la loro improvvisa comparsa ci coglie di sorpresa e ci spaventa. Nascono da qui molte delle preoccupazioni nei confronti delle armi letali autonome e soprattutto la paura che esse possano farci perdere per sempre la nostra umanità.

Lo sviluppo dei robot killer non ci renderà meno sensibili alle sofferenze che possiamo arrecare alle altre persone e alle conseguenze delle nostre azioni

Non sembra esserci alcuna ragione per ritenere che gli avanzamenti tecnologici in guerra debbano necessariamente mettere a rischio ciò che siamo, rendendo, ad esempio, il combattente meno sensibile alla sofferenza del nemico o più indifferente alle conseguenze che l'uso della forza può arrecare alle popolazioni civili coinvolte. Il fatto che si avverta sempre più l'esigenza di ricorrere alle armi soltanto in caso di necessità e soltanto quando non sono più praticabili altre soluzioni, meno dolorose, è la prova che, anche in ambito militare, lo sviluppo tecnologico può andare di pari passo con una crescita della sensibilità morale per le atrocità e gli orrori della guerra. Per chi intraprende la carriera militare valgono ancora oggi alcune virtù tradizionali, come la capacità di restare saldo di fronte ai rischi e agli orrori della guerra, ma nelle nostre società il buon soldato è ormai «colui o colei che partecipa a missioni di pace in aiuto delle popolazioni bisognose, oppure protegge il proprio Paese da aggressioni esterne, e non più come un conquistatore, un invasore o un razziatore».⁴¹ Si può, perciò, anche immaginare uno scenario di guerra ipertecnologico, senza per questo dover trarre conclusioni pessimiste sul carattere dei combattenti. Pur disponendo, infatti, di armi che le passate generazioni non possedevano, i soldati di domani saranno sempre più chiamati, in quanto agenti morali, non soltanto ad assumersi le responsabilità per la guerra che combattono, ma anche, in quanto esseri umani, ad «non annientare – come scrive Donatelli – l'umanità dei loro nemici e anzi di tessere

⁴⁰ P.W. Singer, *Wired for War*, cit., p. 182.

⁴¹ L. Greco, *Il buon soldato e l'agente virtuoso: Hume e la military glory*, in M. Balistreri, M. Benato, M. Mori, *Etica medica nella vita militare. Per iniziare una riflessione*, Ananke, Torino 2014, pp. 107-115, in particolare p. 113,

un filo di solidarietà con loro pur combattendoli».⁴² E considerazioni simili si possono avanzate riguardo alla paura che con lo sviluppo dei robot killer diventerà difficile resistere alla tentazione della guerra. Affinché questo accada, infatti, dovremmo avere un atteggiamento completamente diverso nei confronti della guerra e non essere più capaci di relazionarci alle altre popolazioni e nazioni sulla base di principi di giustizia universali. Dovrebbero venir meno, in altri termini, quelle norme di diritto internazionale che regolano oggi il rapporto tra le nazioni e che permettono una soluzione delle controversie, che possono sorgere, nella maniera più pacifica e condivisa. Naturalmente il nostro atteggiamento nei confronti della guerra e della violenza potrebbe in futuro cambiare, ma è difficile immaginare che questo debba avvenire come conseguenza necessaria dello sviluppo delle macchine “autonome” letali. Per altro, questa nostra conclusione non corre il rischio di essere smentita dall’eventuale uso, sempre più esteso, di queste macchine autonome nelle operazioni militari. Non dobbiamo pensare, infatti, che con l’introduzione dei *lethal autonomous weapons systems* gli esseri umani cederanno il monopolio della guerra alle macchine. Si può, cioè, anche discutere circa la precisione e la sicurezza di queste macchine letali e, di conseguenza, i vantaggi e gli svantaggi di un eventuale loro impiego in combattimento. È, poi, anche legittimo chiedersi se lo sviluppo di queste macchine autonome letali sia la strada obbligata per società che vogliono promuovere la pace e la giustizia e se investire in questa direzione non ci impedisca di immaginare altre soluzioni, meno cruenti, che permetterebbero di raggiungere gli stessi obiettivi. Sarebbe un errore, però, presumere che, con l’impiego dei robot killer nei conflitti armati, la guerra perderà qualsiasi umanità perché sarà combattuta soltanto dalle macchine. Le macchine, infatti, sono meri strumenti allo stesso modo delle armi da fuoco. Non c’è, cioè, alcuna sostanziale differenza tra l’uso dei robot killer e l’uso delle armi da fuoco o qualsiasi altra arma che è stata utilizzata dalle generazioni passate. L’unica differenza è che il momento in cui si preme il grilletto avviene in laboratorio quando si progettano queste macchine e viene elaborato il loro programma, in quanto è attraverso queste istruzioni che fissiamo quando devono far fuoco.⁴³

Ci sarà sempre un responsabile

In questo modo rispondiamo a coloro che ritengono che l’impiego di queste macchine letali produrrebbe necessariamente un incremento inaccettabile della

⁴² P. Donatelli, *Guerre, soldati e sfere dell’etica*, in M. Balistreri, M. Benato, M. Mori, *Etica medica nella vita militare. Per iniziare una riflessione*, cit., pp. 95-105, in particolare p. 105.

⁴³ Alix Rübsaam, *The Case of Killer Robots. Posthuman or not?*, <https://amsterdam.academia.edu/AlixRübsaam>

violenza nei conflitti armati, in quanto non sarebbe possibile, a parte evidentemente le macchine che hanno aperto il fuoco seminando morte e distruzione, identificare un responsabile.⁴⁴ Naturalmente nella costruzione e progettazione delle macchine letali sarebbero coinvolte diverse persone, ognuna con una sua particolare competenza e professionalità.⁴⁵ Tuttavia, una volta costruite, le potenzialità di queste macchine sarebbero conosciute e, pertanto, la responsabilità morale e giuridica per il loro impiego potrebbe essere facilmente attribuita alle persone che hanno impartito l'ordine di utilizzarle o che hanno eseguito gli ordini, avviando la missione dei robot killer o non arrestandola, pur immaginando le conseguenze che essi avrebbero prodotto. Sulla responsabilità del personale militare subordinato si potrebbe ovviamente discutere, in quanto, come del resto accade anche oggi nei conflitti armati, può essere necessario un certo coraggio per mettere in discussione gli ordini impartiti e casomai, rifiutandosi di obbedire, entrare in conflitto con le gerarchie militari. Nella migliore delle ipotesi, l'obiezione di coscienza potrebbe essere rispettata da istituzioni interessate a promuovere all'interno della società una riflessione sulle ragioni della guerra e sui mezzi impiegati per prevalere contro il nemico. Ma in altri casi il soldato obiettore potrebbe essere condannato per insubordinazione e, quindi, pagare con la libertà, se non finanche con la vita, la sua scelta. Se consideriamo, poi, che, nell'eventuale impiego in futuro delle macchine letali, per il soldato sarebbe forse difficile conoscere nel dettaglio non soltanto la natura della missione ma anche i risultati che i comandi militari si aspettano di raggiungere, è ancora più difficile imputargli una responsabilità per i crimini dei robot. La responsabilità dei comandi militari, invece, non sembrerebbe in discussione: per declinare, infatti, qualsiasi loro responsabilità, essi dovrebbero dimostrare di non avere avuto le informazioni corrette sulla capacità di fuoco delle macchine o, comunque, di non aver potuto evitare di ordinare ai soldati il loro impiego. Nel caso, per altro, di un uso illegittimo delle macchine letali andrebbe considerata anche l'eventuale responsabilità morale e giuridica delle istituzioni politiche. Se, ad esempio, hanno incoraggiato i comandi militari ad impiegarle in guerra o, addirittura, hanno ordinato la progettazione di macchine letali ad uso militare con meccanismi di azione in aperta violazione del diritto nazionale e internazionale.⁴⁶ La situazione certamente cambia se la morte e la sofferenza causata dalle macchine letali impiegate può essere imputata ad un loro cattivo

⁴⁴ Riguardo alla questione della responsabilità quando le macchine uccidono, si veda anche D. Dennett, *When HAL Kills, Who's to Blame? Computer Ethics*, in D.G. Stork (a cura di), *HAL's Legacy: 2001's Computer as Dream and Reality*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press 1997, pp. 351-365.

⁴⁵ J.M. Beard, *Autonomous Weapons and Human Responsibilities*, in "Georgetown Journal of International Law", 617, 2014, pp. 617-681, in particolare pp. 661-663; N.C. Crawford, *Accountability for Killing: Moral Responsibility in America's Post 9/11 Wars*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2014, pp. 219-385.

⁴⁶ N.C. Crawford, *Accountability for Killing: Moral Responsibility in America's Post 9/11 Wars*, cit., pp. 387-474.

funzionamento. Nessuno vuole negare che in situazioni come queste l'accertamento della responsabilità possa essere difficile e richiedere anche un periodo lungo di indagini. Ma con questo è ancora da dimostrare che non sarebbe minimamente possibile attribuire a qualcuno la responsabilità morale e giuridica per quanto è accaduto, in quanto possiamo immaginare che lo sviluppo scientifico e tecnologico potrebbe permettere il monitoraggio del funzionamento delle singole parti delle macchine. Dovessero, per altro, i problemi di cattivo funzionamento delle macchine ripetersi sarebbe non soltanto imprudente, ma anche un crimine continuare ad impiegarle. I comandi, cioè, sarebbero responsabili delle atrocità che esse commettono.

La questione della sicurezza e dell'affidabilità dei robot killer è centrale

La questione della sicurezza e dell'affidabilità delle macchine letali è sicuramente l'aspetto centrale da considerare in una valutazione circa la loro accettabilità. Su questo punto siamo pienamente d'accordo con coloro che avanzano dubbi e preoccupazioni nei confronti dello sviluppo degli *autonomous weapons systems*. Anche noi riteniamo, cioè, che sarebbe moralmente sbagliato impiegare queste macchine "autonome" letali in contesti urbani o popolati fino a quando esse non dimostreranno di avere la capacità di distinguere i civili dalle forze militari nemiche. Tuttavia, non possiamo escludere che, grazie allo sviluppo scientifico e tecnologiche, i robot killer possano un giorno acquisire una capacità di discriminazione tra popolazione civile e combattenti nemici molto più precisa di quella che hanno i soldati. Coloro che chiedono, pertanto, che le ricerche sulle macchine "autonome" letali vengano vietate a livello internazionale, sulla base di una loro presunta immoralità, avanzano un argomento di principio che non sembra giustificato razionalmente e che soprattutto impedisce l'eventuale sviluppo e perfezionamento di armamenti che potrebbero, nel futuro, ridurre la morte della popolazione civile nelle guerre.⁴⁷ Non siamo d'accordo, pertanto, che queste armi tecnologiche siano

⁴⁷ Naturalmente resta per un robot, e in particolare per una macchina autonoma programmata a combattere, il problema di decidere cosa fare quando si presenta un dilemma morale. È stato sostenuto che il problema della difficoltà per le macchine autonome letale di valutare la proporzionalità di un attacco e di conseguenza l'accettabilità di «danni collaterali» potrebbe essere affrontato inserendo nella loro memoria una sorta di governatore etico (un programma che vincola queste macchine ad agire seguendo certi principi morali) oppure collegandole ad un operatore che decide per loro quando il dilemma si presenta (in questo caso il problema morale sarebbe segnalato dalla macchina stessa). (R. Arkin, *Governing Lethal Behavior in Autonomous Robots*, Chapman & Hall/CRC, Chapman & Hall/CRC 2009, pp. 125-153; la proposta di Arkin è criticata, tra gli altri, da R. Tonkens, *The Case against Robotic Warfare: A Response to Arkin*, in "Journal of Military Ethics" 11, no. 2, 2012, pp. 149-168). Una soluzione al momento più realistica potrebbe essere quella che prevede il monitoraggio di

intrinsecamente immorali perché non potranno mai essere in grado di distinguere correttamente tra combattenti e civili e, quindi, tra bersagli leciti e bersagli non leciti.⁴⁸ Per altro, si possono esprimere legittimi dubbi circa la necessità che le macchine letali debbano avere la capacità di discriminare tra popolazione civile e combattenti nemici affinché il loro uso nei conflitti armati possa essere moralmente accettabile. I robot killer, infatti, potrebbero essere impiegati come sottomarini di guerra o in missioni contro le difese aeree nemiche, cioè in contesti in cui – come ricorda Robert Sparrow – non sono presenti potenziali target oltre che obiettivi militari.⁴⁹ Se, poi, queste macchine fossero dotate soltanto di armi non letali, il loro impiego potrebbe essere giustificato anche in contesti in cui è presente la popolazione civile in quanto il loro intervento servirebbe soltanto a bloccare il nemico in attesa dell'arrivo dell'esercito e il danno che potrebbero infliggere ai civili sarebbe temporaneo: «La tesi che le armi autonome non avranno mai la capacità di distinguere in maniera affidabile tra obiettivi militari e non appare perciò non corretta».⁵⁰ Una questione molto più complessa è se le macchine “autonome” letali potrebbero condurre missioni e quindi operazioni militari giuridicamente legittime senza infliggere al nemico perdite sproporzionate all'obiettivo che si intende raggiungere. Ma anche in questo caso, si può ragionevolmente supporre che si possano distinguere situazioni di intervento armato diverse ed identificare circostanze in cui l'uso delle macchine “autonome” letali sarebbe compatibile con il diritto internazionale. Queste circostanze potranno essere più o meno ampie, a seconda delle capacità che queste macchine avranno come risultato dello sviluppo scientifico e tecnologico, ma non sembrano esserci ragioni per ritenere che la «forza di fuoco» che, con esse, potremo esercitare contro gli obiettivi nemici sarà sempre sproporzionata. Assumere, in altri termini, un'incompatibilità di principio tra l'impiego dei robot killer ed un uso proporzionato della forza significa, ancora una volta, dimenticare che queste macchine sono dei semplici strumenti a nostra disposizione, che noi possiamo utilizzare nel modo e per gli obiettivi che più desideriamo. Neanche nel caso delle macchine autonome letali, infine, vale

queste macchine da parte di un operatore che interviene prima che facciano scelte immorali. In questo caso si perderebbero i vantaggi che abbiamo descritto prima.

⁴⁸ Pax, *Deadly Decisions. 8 Objections to Killer Robots*, Netherlands 2014, p. 12. Vedi anche Pax, *Does Unmanned Make Unacceptable? Exploring the Debate on Using Drones and Robot in Warfare*, Netherlands 2011.

⁴⁹ R. Sparrow, *Robots and Respect: Assessing the Case Against Autonomous Weapon Systems*, cit., p. 112; J. Carlos Rossi, *La guerra che verrà: le armi autonome*, cit. p. 12: «Convinzione sempre più diffusa tra gli esperti di tecnologia militare è quella di vedere l'ambiente marino, dati i molti conflitti per le acque costiere ancora oggi presenti in varie parti del mondo, il teatro possibile entro cui si muoveranno i futuri sistemi autonomi»; UNIDIR, *The Weaponization of Increasingly Autonomous Technologies in the Maritime Environment: Testing the Waters*, Unidir Resources, n.4, 2015, pp. 1-2: <http://www.unidir.ch/files/publications/pdfs/testing-the-waters-en-634.pdf>.

⁵⁰ R. Sparrow, *Robots and Respect: Assessing the Case Against Autonomous Weapon Systems*, cit., p. 103.

l'argomento del pendio scivoloso (*slippery slope*) molto spesso invocato nell'ambito che riguarda la bioetica per sostenere l'inaccettabilità morale delle nuove biotecnologie. Perché, infatti, non dovremmo essere capaci di distinguere gli usi moralmente accettabili di queste macchine da quelli che invece non sono moralmente accettabili? Ad esempio, potremmo scegliere di impiegare i robot killer per le operazioni di difesa nei confronti di possibili attacchi che possono provenire dal cielo. Ma perché, una volta che avremo presa questa decisione, dovremmo, poi, essere costretti a giustificare un loro impiego in aeree che sono estremamente popolate dove possono nascondersi criminali, terroristi o soldati dell'esercito nemico? O accettare il loro uso in guerra anche se non abbiamo risultati sufficientemente incoraggianti circa la loro capacità di discriminare tra combattenti e civili e, più in generale, di bilanciare l'importanza degli obiettivi militari e della missione con il dovere di non infliggere danni alle persone che non partecipano al conflitto. Inoltre, coloro che chiedono un bando internazionale delle macchine killer per paura che poi diventerebbe impossibile escludere un loro uso moralmente inaccettabile, dovrebbe spiegarci perché nel caso delle armi che oggi vengono usate in ambito militare sarebbe possibile distinguere gli usi moralmente buoni da quelli cattivi, mentre, con lo sviluppo dei robot killer, questo non sarebbe più possibile farlo. In fondo, non facciamo questa stessa distinzione per qualsiasi oggetto che usiamo? Non sarebbe una posizione veramente convincente quella di chi volesse sostenere che la nostra capacità di discriminare tra usi moralmente accettabili e non accettabili verrebbe meno o sarebbe molto meno affidabile con le tecnologie più nuove. Si può, infatti, veramente sostenere che il nostro mondo è peggiorato nel corso dei secoli con l'introduzione e con l'avvento di tecnologie sempre più nuove e che più ci allontanavamo da una condizione naturale più le nostre società si corrompevano? Nel corso della storia posizioni di questo tipo sono state ciclicamente riproposte, ma non sono minimamente giustificate in quanto non soltanto danno per scontato che sia veramente possibile fare riferimento a una nostra condizione naturale, ma presuppongono anche che ciò che è naturale sia necessariamente buono e desiderabile.⁵¹

4. ESISTE UN DIRITTO AD UCCIDERE IN GUERRA?

⁵¹ D. Birnbacher, *Naturalness. Is the "Natural" Preferable to the "Artificial"*, University Press of America, Lanham (Maryland) 2014.

Per quanto riguarda, poi, la preoccupazione che lo sviluppo e, di conseguenza, l'impiego delle macchine letali possano snaturare profondamente l'umanità della guerra, rendendola più simile ad un'esecuzione che ad un confronto aperto ed imprevedibile in cui entrambe le parti hanno la possibilità di difendersi e combattere⁵², valgono le stesse considerazioni che altrove abbiamo avanzato discutendo gli interventi tecnologici finalizzati a migliorare la prestazione del combattente.⁵³ In primo luogo, non dovremmo dimenticare che, contrariamente a quanto spesso sostenuto, il desiderio di uccidere i propri nemici in sicurezza ed a distanza non è affatto nuovo, in quanto si iscrive nella tradizione delle guerre asimmetriche, in cui le mitragliatrici venivano spesso utilizzate contro le lance o fucili.⁵⁴ Non tiene, pertanto, adeguatamente conto della storia chi suppone che le macchine autonome letali produrrebbero scenari a noi completamente sconosciuti, perché permetterebbero ai soldati di combattere lontano dal fuoco dei propri nemici. È vero, per altro, che la storia umana è costellata di episodi in cui le tecnologie militari sono state impiegate in guerra per sterminare popolazioni inermi ed indifese che non avevano, o avevano una possibilità molto limitata, di uccidere il proprio nemico. Tuttavia, contrariamente a quanto sembrano supporre i critici delle nuove tecnologie, non c'è alcuno motivo per pensare che le macchine autonome letali non possano essere impiegate per missioni militari rivolte a promuovere la pace e la giustizia. Al contrario, i robot killer potrebbero diventare uno strumento molto allettante per una comunità internazionale impegnata, attraverso interventi di *peace keeping* e *peace enforcing*, a difendere, sempre di più, i diritti e le libertà delle persone, in quanto il loro uso esporrebbe molto meno alla morte la vita dei propri cittadini. Inoltre, a coloro che temono che lo sviluppo dei robot killer possa trasformare la guerra in assassinio e negare al combattente nemico il diritto di difendersi, possiamo rispondere che, nel caso di un conflitto armato, la supremazia tecnologica non toglie necessariamente al nemico la possibilità di combattere o di uccidere. Senza dubbio, in molte situazioni l'impiego di nuove tecnologie ha permesso alle forze combattenti di prevalere su un nemico meno equipaggiato con grande facilità, colpendo le sue difese e scoraggiando in lui qualsiasi tentativo di resistenza. È successo in passato, accade ai nostri giorni e questo avverrà anche in futuro: «I cannoni, le armature, le spade, i moschetti ed in cavalli – scrive P.W. Singer – colpirono profondamente le popolazioni inca che vivevano in un tempo in cui le comunicazioni erano difficili ed era difficile avere informazioni sul resto del mondo. Questo non erano soltanto il primo loro contatto con queste armi, ma essi non avevamo mai immaginato prima di allora la reale possibilità di una tecnologia così terribile. Anche nel nostro mondo saturo di informazioni, però, l'uso dei nuovi

⁵² G. Chamayou, *Teoria del drone. Principi filosofici del diritto di uccidere*, cit., p. 158.

⁵³ M. Balistreri, *Umanità ed integrità del soldato potenziato: alcune riflessioni di bioetica militare*, in "Ethics and Politics", 2015, XII, 1, pp. 127-146.

⁵⁴ G. Chamayou, *Teoria del drone. Principi filosofici del diritto di uccidere*, cit., p. 89.

armamenti tecnologici può ancora avere un effetto psicologico potente. Per esempio, un colonnello della Guardia Repubblicana, l'élite dell'esercito iracheno, spiega che la ragione per cui le sue forze rinunciarono così velocemente a combattere durante l'invasione del 2003 era che 'la tecnologia militare americana va oltre l'immaginazione'.⁵⁵ La storia, tuttavia, ci offre molti esempi di situazioni in cui eserciti e popolazioni, in condizioni di evidente inferiorità tecnologica, hanno tenuto testa al nemico. A prescindere, infatti, dalle importanti possibilità che le nuove tecnologie offrono, le forze in campo che sono chiamate a combattere un nemico ipertecnologico, possono non arrendersi alla sconfitta e, dopo un primo momento di scoramento, ingegnarsi per trovare contromisure capaci di contrastare la forza dell'avversario. Alcune volte le contromisure possono essere molto semplici e primitive. In Iraq, ad esempio, per neutralizzare i robot di terra, impiegati per disinnescare gli ordini esplosivi, i rivoltosi scavavano *trappole tigre* ovvero buche profonde non visibili in cui le macchine cadevano prima di raggiungere il loro obiettivo. Ma contro la supremazia tecnologica del nemico possono essere usate anche strategie poco convenzionali o che comportano una violazione delle regole di guerra. La scelta, ad esempio, di mascherare gli obiettivi militari come strutture civili oppure di impiegare in questi luoghi scudi umani o, ancora, di ricorrere ad attentatori suicidi contrasta con il diritto internazionale e però può avere risultati militari importanti. I dispositivi elettronici, inoltre, non soltanto possono essere bloccati o mandati in tilt, ma possono anche essere *hackerati* oppure dirottati in un'altra direzione, convincendoli a rivolgere la loro potenza di fuoco contro il proprio schieramento. Si può immaginare, poi, che, una volta sviluppate, le nuove tecnologie potranno essere acquisite anche dalle nazioni o dai gruppi contro i quali sono impiegate. Ad esempio, come ricorda P.W. Singer, «Israele può essere stato uno dei primi stati a sviluppare e ad usare i droni in guerra, ma questo non ha impedito che fosse il primo paese ad essere attaccato da droni pilotati da organizzazioni non statali».⁵⁶

Ma ammettiamo pure che questi sistemi autonomi letali cancellino le possibilità di combattimento del nemico, privandolo della possibilità di uccidere o di difendersi. Sarebbe sempre sbagliato usare queste macchine contro una persona o un gruppo di persone (esercito o terroristi) e non concedere loro, quindi, il diritto di ucciderci? Il fatto che una tecnologia militare possa ridurre o addirittura azzerare le possibilità di combattimento del nemico viene considerata dai maggiori critici dell'impiego delle macchine autonome qualcosa che degraderebbe la guerra e il soldato: «se esiste il diritto di uccidere senza commettere un delitto, è perché tale diritto è mutualmente concesso. Se accetto di conferire all'altro il diritto di uccidere, me o i miei, impunemente, è perché conto di poter godere a mia volta di questa esenzione se lo

⁵⁵ P.W. Singer, *Wired for War*, cit., p. 300.

⁵⁶ P.W. Singer, *Wired for War*, cit., p. 264.

uccidessi io. La decriminalizzazione dell'omicidio in guerra presuppone una struttura di reciprocità. Si può uccidere perché ci si uccide a vicenda». ⁵⁷ Questa visione delle cose, però, presuppone un modello di guerra come duello a cui può essere contrapposta da una concezione diversa e più etica ⁵⁸ che attribuisce soltanto al soldato che combatte una guerra giusta il diritto di usare la forza. E secondo questa concezione della guerra, privare il proprio nemico della possibilità di combattere è sbagliato soltanto se noi siamo impegnati in una guerra ingiusta. In caso contrario non lo è, perché il nostro nemico non ha il diritto di ucciderci. Possiamo, perciò, anche ipotizzare che l'uso delle macchine autonome letali priverebbe chi viene attaccato della possibilità di difendersi e di uccidere, senza con questo dover concludere che in questo modo la guerra si trasformerebbe in assassinio, ovvero in un'uccisione di un'altra persona che non può essere mai giustificata. Anche se, cioè, immaginiamo gli scenari più fantascientifici è difficile pensare che l'impiego dei soldati robot umilierebbe necessariamente la nostra umanità. Questa conclusione, del resto, risulta ancora più convincente se teniamo conto che a livello internazionale andiamo sempre più verso uno scenario in cui l'impiego della violenza appare essere giustificato soltanto a protezione dei diritti umani, come operazione di polizia finalizzata a ristabilire o portare la pace (*peacekeeping*). Se, infatti, a livello nazionale riteniamo moralmente corretto attribuire soltanto agli agenti di polizia il diritto morale e giuridico di ricorrere alla forza, si dovrebbe spiegare perché a livello internazionale varrebbe una regola diversa e sarebbe giusto riconoscere al criminale il diritto di fare violenza ed uccidere. Naturalmente si può discutere circa l'eventuale pretesa dei paesi che impiegheranno i robot killer di avere un diritto legittimo all'uso della forza e della violenza, ma il punto è che un intervento armato giustificato a livello di diritto internazionale, indipendentemente dal tipo di armamenti impiegati sul campo di battaglia, non può essere contestato sul piano giuridico e morale facendo riferimento solamente all'asimmetria che caratterizza le parti per quanto riguarda l'uso della forza. È poi vero che un paese che impiegasse le macchine autonome letali per finalità contrarie al diritto internazionale e su un nemico che non può usare robot killer agirebbe in aperta violazione del diritto ed il suo intervento non sarebbe ammissibile. In questo caso, però, quello che renderebbe la guerra illegittima non è il fatto che essa venga mossa contro un nemico più debole dal punto di vista degli armamenti, ma l'assenza di ragioni per l'intervento armato giuridicamente valide ed accettabili.

⁵⁷ G. Chamayou, *Teoria del drone. Principi filosofici del diritto di uccidere*, cit., p. 159.

⁵⁸ J. MacMahan, *Killing in War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009; J. McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing in War*, in "Ethics", 114 (4), 2004, pp. 693-673; J. McMahan, *Innocence, Self-Defense and Killing in War*, in "Journal of Political Philosophy", 2 (3), 1994, pp. 193-221; J. McMahan, *Self-Defense and the Problem of the Innocent Attacker*, in "Ethics", 104 (2), 1994, pp. 252-290.

È disumano uccidere il nemico con i robot?

Ancora meno accettabile, infine, è la tesi che l'impiego delle macchine autonome letali non potrebbe mai superare l'esame morale perché l'uccisione di un essere umano attraverso la violenza di una macchina sarebbe sempre moralmente deplorabile, in quanto sarebbe il segno di una mancanza di rispetto verso il proprio nemico. A prescindere, cioè, da se il proprio nemico possa impiegare gli stessi armamenti, non sarebbe mai giusto ricorrere e combattere con i robot killer in quanto «qualsiasi cosa uno fa ad un'altra persona intenzionalmente deve essere rivolta a lui come soggetto, con l'intenzione che egli la riceva come un soggetto. Essa dovrebbe manifestare un'attitudine a lui piuttosto che semplicemente alla situazione, ed egli dovrebbe essere capace di riconoscerlo e identificare lui stesso come il suo oggetto».⁵⁹ In altri termini, la guerra può essere giusta soltanto se viene combattuta mantenendo un rapporto interpersonale con il proprio nemico e rispettando la sua umanità. Ma ucciderlo con l'uso di una macchina non avrebbe proprio niente di umano, in quanto quale relazione ci potrebbe mai essere tra un robot e un combattente? «(...) non c'è niente di particolarmente problematico – afferma Sparrow – nell'idea che le macchine autonome letali possano essere un mezzo illegittimo di uccidere per il fatto di negare qualsiasi rispetto all'umanità del nostro nemico».⁶⁰ Tuttavia, un'obiezione di questo tipo non considera che le macchine autonome sono strumenti di guerra molti simili a quelle armi (ad esempio, missili, bombe e razzi) ampiamente impiegate da decenni nei teatri di guerra senza alcun sospetto circa la loro ammissibilità morale a causa del modo in cui uccidono il nemico. Quando un ufficiale lancia un missile da crociera per colpire un obiettivo a 1.000 chilometri di distanza «è altamente improbabile che lui (o lei) conosca l'identità di coloro che intende uccidere. Le mine e gli ordigni esplosivi improvvisati uccidono chiunque capita di innescarli e quindi colpiscono persone la cui identità è in realtà indeterminata e non solo sconosciuta contingentemente. Se è possibile un rapporto interpersonale quando utilizziamo queste armi, non è chiaro il motivo per cui non ci potrebbe essere una relazione interpersonale tra il comandante che lancia un AWS e la gente che uccide. Pertanto, nessuna di queste caratteristiche degli AWS sembrerebbe sembrare essere un ostacolo all'esistenza del rapporto appropriato di rispetto».⁶¹ Per altro, secondo l'obiezione che stiamo considerando uccidere

⁵⁹ T. Nagel, *War and Massacre*, in "Philosophy & Public Affairs" 1, no. 2, 1972, pp. 123-144, in particolare p. 136. È Robert Sparrow che fa riferimento a questo articolo di Nagel nella sua critica ai robot killer, R. Sparrow, *Robots and Respect: Assessing the Case Against Autonomous Weapon Systems*, cit., p. 108.

⁶⁰ R. Sparrow, *Robots and Respect: Assessing the Case Against Autonomous Weapon Systems*, cit., p. 110.

⁶¹ R. Sparrow, *Robots and Respect: Assessing the Case Against Autonomous Weapon Systems*, cit., pp. 107-108.

attraverso una macchina sarebbe sbagliato perché non sarebbe corretto uccidere a distanza, senza presentare attenzione alla persona che verrà colpita o ignorando la sua identità. Ma quale sarebbe, allora, la distanza più giusta per uccidere un'altra persona? Una persona che apre il fuoco con una pistola di calibro «9» è sufficientemente vicina alla persona che uccide da mostrarle rispetto per la sua dignità? Oppure uccidere con una pistola di calibro «9» è ancora un'uccisione a distanza, perché l'unica forma di uccisione moralmente accettabile (o, comunque rispetto dell'altro) è quella che risulta da uno scontro corpo a corpo tra chi uccide e ucciso? Inoltre, si dovrebbe spiegare se l'uccidere «da vicino» è condizione sufficiente o necessaria per rendere l'uccisione dell'altro rispettosa della sua umanità. Sarebbe cosa molto strana affermare che colpire a morte qualcuno a distanza ravvicinata è sufficiente a rendere la sua uccisione rispettosa della sua umanità e dignità, in quanto si può uccidere l'altro pur non avendo alcuna ragione morale per farlo. Chi uccide, ad esempio, per gelosia non mostra affatto rispetto per l'umanità dell'altro. Sembra, pertanto, che la distanza tra chi uccide e chi è ucciso possa essere moralmente rilevante soltanto per stabilire l'umanità degli omicidi eticamente accettabili. Tuttavia, anche in quei casi che riguardano le uccisioni moralmente legittime, non soltanto la «vicinanza» non rende necessariamente chi uccide più umano, ma la «lontananza» non è sempre il segno di un'uccisione poco rispettosa dell'altro. Immaginiamo, ad esempio, una persona (X) che uccide un aggressore (Y) per legittima difesa: X ha ragioni più che fondate per ritenere che Y intende ucciderlo. X vede attraverso un monitor che Y ha scavalcato il cancello di casa: l'abitazione è isolata, a casa non c'è nessun altro e le linee telefoniche sono state manomesse. X però può ancora salvarsi: può uccidere Y liberando all'ingresso di casa una sostanza letale che toglierà la vita ad Y in pochi secondi e senza farlo soffrire oppure lasciare che Y entri in camera sua e poi ucciderlo con un lancia fiamme. Non sembra che X faccia la cosa più giusta e più rispettosa dell'umanità di Y se ritarda la sua uccisione al momento in cui avrà la possibilità di essere di fronte a lui, in quanto in questo modo lo condanna ad una morte preceduta da una lunga agonia. E questo nostro giudizio non cambia nemmeno se assumiamo che X non conosca l'identità di Y o, ad ogni modo, non possa accertarla da subito attraverso il monitor. Possiamo avere, poi, altre ragioni morali per preferire l'uccisione a distanza. Immaginiamo, ad esempio, di avere la possibilità di intervenire per porre termine ad un assedio di una cittadina densamente popolata da parte di un gruppo di terroristi. Più passano i giorni e più aumenta il numero di persone che muore di fame o di malattia. Noi possiamo decidere di colpire i terroristi lanciando missili da una portaerei oppure mobilitando l'esercito e facendo arrivare in pochi giorni truppe di terra. Anche in questo caso la scelta moralmente migliore sembra quella di uccidere a distanza perché in questo modo salviamo la vita a molte persone che altrimenti morirebbero. Questo dimostra che uccidere a distanza non soltanto non è sbagliato, ma non è nemmeno peggiore dell'uccidere da vicino, guardando negli occhi il nemico.

Non è vero che l'impiego dei robot killer porterà alla scomparsa delle democrazie

Appartengono, invece, completamente all'orizzonte della fantascienza le obiezioni avanzate da coloro che ritengono che con lo sviluppo delle macchine autonome letali le popolazioni delle democrazie occidentali lasceranno il potere politico nelle mani di pochissime persone perché non si interesseranno più alla guerra. Non è per niente chiaro, infatti, quale collegamento ci sarebbe tra un coinvolgimento minore dei soldati in guerra (o la loro completa sostituzione) e l'accentramento del potere in poche mani. La partecipazione politica, infatti, è importante perché è soprattutto attraverso i meccanismi democratici che si decidono questioni che riguardano la cosa pubblica. Il possibile coinvolgimento in conflitti armati è soltanto una delle molte ragioni che ci spingono a partecipare all'attività politica e a difendere le istituzioni democratiche. Anche ammesso pertanto che la guerra possa non avere per noi più interesse, altre questioni (dalla sanità alla scuola, dal lavoro alla casa, dal reddito di cittadinanza alle tasse, dalla medicina alla bioetica) continueranno a restare per noi importanti. Con questo, comunque, non intendiamo sostenere che è impossibile che una cerchia molto ristretta di persone possa arrivare a programmare le macchine autonome letali per piegarle al proprio servizio e per accentrare il potere nelle loro mani. Anche se infatti, i robot killer potranno richiedere una gestione, una manutenzione e un monitoraggio e quindi la partecipazione ed il lavoro di molte persone, molto di questo lavoro potrà anche essere eseguito da altri sistemi automatizzati. Non si può escludere pertanto la possibilità che queste macchine sfuggano al controllo della popolazione e delle istituzioni delle nostre società democratiche. Vogliamo solamente affermare che non è inevitabile che questo accada. Possiamo promuovere una maggiore automazione nel campo degli armamenti senza che questo produca un indebolimento della democrazia a vantaggio di piccole oligarchie. Non soltanto potremmo sviluppare tecnologie che nel prossimo futuro ci permettono di ridurre molto il rischio di un cattivo uso delle macchine autonome letali, ma con lo sviluppo di sistemi di automazione sempre più sofisticati ed efficienti il controllo dei robot killer potrebbe non essere sufficiente per controllare la società. Inoltre, le prospettive che si aprono con la ricerca sul *genome editing* potrebbero metterci nella condizione di portare al mondo persone potenziate moralmente, che avranno il massimo rispetto per le istituzioni democratiche e i loro rappresentanti e non penseranno di usare le macchine autonome per ambizioni di potere.⁶² Siamo d'accordo che è difficile prevedere il futuro e valutare qual è

⁶² J. Savulescu, I. Persson, *Unfit for the Future: The Need for Moral Enhancement*, Oxford, Oxford University Press 2012; Mark Walker, *Enhancing Genetic Virtue. A Project for Twenty-First Century Humanity?*, "Politics and The life Sciences", 28, 2, 2009, pp. 27-47; T. Douglas, *Moral Enhancement*

veramente il rischio che le macchine autonome finiscano nelle mani di poche persone malintenzionate. Questa però è una ragione per rimandare decisioni definitive a domani, quando avremo un'idea molto più precisa dell'efficienza e della precisione che possiamo raggiungere con i robot killer e saremo a quel punto in una condizione migliore per ragionare sui pericoli di una loro eventuale introduzione nei campi di battaglia. Non è vero, infatti, che se continuiamo lo sviluppo e il perfezionamento delle macchine autonome letali e incominciamo ad impiegarle nelle operazioni di guerra, poi – anche nel caso in cui ci rendessimo conto che esse potrebbero danneggiare seriamente la società liberale e mettere in pericolo le sue istituzioni democratiche – non avremo più alcuna possibilità di tornare indietro e vietare il loro uso. È già successo che armamenti impiegati in guerra (si pensi, ad esempio, alle armi chimiche o alle mine antiuomo o alle bombe a grappolo) siano stati giudicati moralmente inaccettabili e successivamente banditi attraverso trattati internazionali o multilaterali. Perché non dovremmo essere in grado di fare lo stesso con le macchine autonome?

CONCLUSIONI

I robot killer non rappresentano che l'ultimo sforzo degli esseri umani di servirsi della tecnologia per produrre strumenti con i quali affrontare e combattere i nemici e vincerli. La possibilità che nel futuro i conflitti armati vengano sempre più combattute e di conseguenza decise da macchine autonome letali può sembrare fantascienza. Tuttavia, la pubblicazione recente di un'importante letteratura sul tema e la campagna lanciata da alcune organizzazioni non governative per un trattato internazionale che proibisca l'uso delle armi autonome mostra che lo scenario discusso in questo saggio è molto più concreto di quanto a prima vista potrebbe apparire. Per altro, l'impiego nei recenti conflitti armati sempre più frequente e diffuso di veicoli con guida remota sembra la premessa per l'introduzione dei robot killer. Lo sviluppo e l'eventuale impiego di queste macchine negli scenari di guerra solleva problematiche estremamente complesse con le quali siamo chiamati a confrontarci. Non esistono, però, ragioni di principio che giustificano una loro proibizione: soprattutto esse non possono minacciare la nostra umanità o l'umanità della guerra, in quanto è da sempre che la tecnologica fa parte e modella le nostre

vite. La nostra umanità, del resto, si definisce non in contrapposizione ma anche attraverso la tecnologia, perché è anche attraverso il suo uso che arriviamo a determinare cosa significa appartenere alla specie umana e cosa ci caratterizza veramente.⁶³ Non si tratta, cioè, di riconoscersi come umani nell'altro che è la tecnologia, ma di prendere atto che il sé e l'altro tecnologico non sono veramente distinguibili. Che non c'è un sé che viene prima della tecnologia e che l'incorpora come qualcos'altro, ma che il sé è già da sempre anche tecnologia e, quindi, natura ibrida. Con questo non vogliamo affermare che ogni innovazione tecnologia è, di per sé, buona e che non occorre continuare una riflessione sull'eticità delle macchine autonome. Da una parte, i critici delle macchine autonome letali hanno ragione nel sottolineare le difficoltà che esse possono avere nel rispettare i principi di discriminazione, di proporzionalità e di necessità dello *jus in bello* (il diritto in guerra). Dall'altra sembrano avere ragione coloro che affermano che i robot killer potrebbero essere impiegati senza questi problemi in aree molto circoscritte, come quelle navali o aeree, in cui non è presente una popolazione civile che potrebbe essere colpita. L'opportunità di usare i robot killer in guerra dovrà essere valutata tenendo conto dei vantaggi e degli svantaggi che essi promettono ad una comunità internazionale impegnata a difendere, anche con la forza, i diritti e le libertà dei cittadini. È ancora presto per esprimere un giudizio definitivo sulla loro sicurezza ed efficacia. Tuttavia, fermare la ricerca sulle nuove tecnologiche robotiche e sulle loro applicazioni in ambito militare vorrebbe dire rinunciare *a priori* e per i prossimi decenni a strumenti che potrebbero servire a rendere il nostro mondo più giusto e pacifico.

⁶³ M. Balistreri, Potenziamento in ambito militare: discussione di alcune questioni morali, M. Balistreri, M. Benato, M. Mori, *Etica medica nella vita militare. Per iniziare una riflessione*, cit., pp. 65-78.

POVERTY INC.: AN ECONOMIC AND LIBERTARIAN ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

According to the movie *Poverty, Inc.* voluntary contributions to inhabitants of poor countries from church and other such groups hurt the recipients instead of helping them. These transfers of income should be stopped in the name of economic development. For one thing, they breed dependency; for another, their volatile delivery schedules hurt the local economy. The present paper takes sharp issue with these contentions.

KEYWORDS

Charity, economic development, free enterprise, foreign “aid”

I. INTRODUCTION

Poverty Inc. (Miller, 2014) is a film which makes the case that foreign aid to poor countries is detrimental to their local economies.

The praise for this film has been so enthusiastic, indeed overwhelming, we must wonder why it has not yet won the Academy Award for a documentary, and, indeed, its writers Nobel Prizes in economics.¹

We have an entirely different view of this film. It favors buying local (thus attacking national and international trade), and opposes private charity (which, as far as we are concerned, is part and parcel of the free enterprise system and thus is apodictically beneficial).² It also misconstrues economic volatility, and thus misses the positive role of the speculator.

In section II, we consider, and reject, the underlying economic premises of the film. In section III we cite some of the hagiographic praise for it, and offer a critical alternative perspective. We conclude in section IV.

II. THE UNDERLYING ECONOMIC PREMISES

A offers to B the following deal: A will give B “stuff”, from time to time at moments to be determined, solely, by A. The “stuff” will consist of all kinds of things: a car, a motorcycle, a bushel of wheat, shoes, a ton of cotton, a violin, a bushel of corn, 100 chickens, 5 cows, another car, a second bushel of corn, etc., bloody etc. These gifts, from one individual A, to another person B, will be delivered at random. Sometimes, a gift of these sorts will be made every day, every other day, every month, every other month, every year, every other year. Sometimes every third week, month, year. These offers will be made on entirely unpredictable basis, with no rhyme or reason. All the recipient can do is accept these gifts on a piecemeal basis or refuse them. That is, every time a discrete offer is made, he can accept it or not. He too can do so on a random basis. For example, he may wish to accept all offers that begin with an a (apples) none that begin with a b (bananas) all that begin with a c (carrots, cars) and may switch his acceptances randomly. We posit that none of the items offered are garbage goods. That is, we

¹ The latter is a bit over the top, but not the former.

² At least in the ex ante sense

do not include sewerage, or poisons. Nor, even, do we deliver from A to B so much of any item that the marginal utility thereof is negative.³

Now for the \$64K question, or, rather, a series of them: is A violating B's rights in making this offer? Is A, B's benefactor or exploiter? If B accepts A's offer, what will happen to B's wealth? Will it increase or decrease? Will B become unemployed as a result of A's largesse? If we were B's economic advisor, would we advise B to tell A to take a hike, or to be grateful to him and accept his offer with alacrity?

When put in these terms, it is clear that these questions are the raving of a madman. The reader by this point has lost all patience with the authors of this present article. He is likely to say, where can I get a hold of an A like this? How lucky is B? I wish I were in his shoes. A violates B's rights? What controlled substance are you imbibing, you economic illiterate? Have you ever heard of indifference curves or production possibilities curves?⁴ Of course B's position will be improved by these charitable offers. Were this not the case, B, fool that he would be, would simply refuse these gifts.⁵

But what about the volatility? B cannot count upon the timing or type of gifts forthcoming from A. It is simple. If the unlikely case, B has an option. He can simply refuse to have anything whatsoever to do with A. B can simply spurn A and his offer. B can say to A, a pox on you and your gifts. Never darken my doorstep, ever again.

However, if B does accept A's beneficence then we as economists are entitled to deduce that, at least in the example sense, B's lot is improved by this decision of his. Otherwise, he could scarcely have accepted it. Nor is this conclusion of ours a mere empirical one, true, perhaps, in most but not all cases. Au contraire, this is a rather of apodictic certainty. To deny this would be equivalent to accepting a logical contradiction. Matters are of course different *ex post*. B might for any

³ Or we assume away all costs or disposal of any of these items. They can be made to disappear costlessly if B tires of any or all of them. We also assume away any taxes.

⁴ In the former case, B, the recipient, moves to a higher indifference curve than before. In the latter case, B, or all the B's in the country, also transit to a higher one. For the Austrian critique of indifference curves, see: Barnett, 2003; Block, 1980, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2009A, 2009B, Block and Barnett, 2010; Callahan, 2003; Rothbard, 2004, pp. 265, 267; Wysocki, 2016

⁵ Would it make any difference to our analysis if A were rich, and B, poor? Of course not. It would be more than passing curious for a poor man to be able to subsidize a rich man in any case.

number of reasons regret his acceptance of these highly volatile cornucopia; perhaps he will regret this because he has become dependent upon these gifts. Maybe, his enthusiasm for learning, for education, for self-improvement will have atrophied. But, no matter. It simply cannot be denied that ex ante he necessarily gains, that A is his benefactor, not exploiter, and this is our sole concern at this point.

Let us now shift gears. Instead of an individual A making this offer to B, it is C, a group of persons, making this offer to D, another collection of people. And, we stress the Cs are relatively wealthy, and the Ds, poor.

So, again we ask, should D accept C's largesse? Is C a benefactor or exploiter of D? Is D's economic welfare enhanced or worsened if he follows this siren song of C's and avails himself of C's wealth? Again, also in this case, it is difficult to resist the notion that if D accepts this wealth, given, again, on a very volatile basis, he will be better off than if he does not. Yes ex post, it is merely an empirical claim that D can jump to a higher indifference curve with C's help than without it. It is hard to reject the conclusion that D ought to be grateful to C, and not resentful.

Why do we go on and on, and on and on some more, about this point? Why are we beating a dead horse in this regard? Do we not have pity for dead horses, and for long-suffering and by now very bored readers? No. Not a bit of it. We do so because of Poverty, Inc. and the very positive reactions to it, by commentators who really should know better.⁶

But are we not committing the falling of composition with our claim that if B would be better off accepting A's offer, then the same goes for D vis a vis C? No, we are not. However, we concede, there are certain differences between the cases, which we now explore.

First, consider the case of the chicken farmer who has just purchased 1,000 of these fowl. Whereupon C starts giving out eggs to all and sundry. How long will this orgy of gift giving continue? Who knows?⁷ C is arbitrary and capricious in this regard. What will now happen to the local egg producer? Well, this great supply of free eggs will drive down the price of this commodity to zero, or near enough so as to make little or no difference. The argument against our thesis is that at least one member of the recipient group, D, the domestic egg producer, will be bankrupted, so all can no longer say that it is an apodictic truth that all the Ds will benefit.

⁶ Here are some of the highly positive recommendations and evaluations of this film: Bowyer, 2015; La, 2015; Debruge, 2015

⁷ That is precisely the point of the volatility; the pons asinorum of the objection to this entire process on the part of the critics of this type of foreign aid.

The consumers? Surely. But the producers? Not all of them certainly not those forced to compete with the C's, who are giving it away for free. But even here we have not given full credit to our critics. For they will deny that even the consumers will gain. Yes, they will concede, in the short run, when they gobble up all the free eggs. But when this donation ceases, and the domestic egg farmers lie in ruins, their economic welfare, too, will take a nosedive.

But we go too fast here, with this objection. If we accept it, what can we say to the counter objection that what C did to the chicken farmers in this case is precisely what Henry Ford and his ilk did to the horse and buggy industry; the computer to the typewriter and (Kodak) film industry; the air conditioner to the industry producing fans. No. We must maintain that the free enterprise system benefits all market participants, but that the whip and bridle and saddle makers and blacksmiths, etc. were no longer part of the market after Henry Ford got through with them, and that the same applies to those producing typewriters, fans and films. The authors of the present article offer now to sell to all readers a pair of shoelaces for \$1 million. Are there any takers? We thought not. Are we then market participants? Not at all. In order to deserve that honorific, we must make a commercial transaction with at least one other party, and this we have failed to do with our shoelace offer.

But the same exact situation pertains to the chicken farmer in our example. He *previously* was part of the market, before the advent of the free egg-bearing Cs. However, this is no longer the case.⁸ If we say that he was exploited by the Cs, with their free eggs, we are logically compelled to apply the same assessment in all these other cases. But we cannot do any such thing without jettisoning the entire free enterprise system, along with its necessary concomitant, competition. If we wish to support the new aforementioned technology that outcompeted the old, we cannot say nay to the Cs, who economically obliterate the chicken farmer in our case of the temporary free eggs.

But all is not lost to the chicken farmer in the recipient country. He can borrow a leaf from McGee's (1958) analysis of the Standard Oil case of 1911. What went on there? According to the muckrakers (Tarbell, 1904), Rockefeller adopted a

⁸ And the same can be said for those whose services are no longer required thanks to the auto, the computer, the air conditioner

policy eerily similar to the Cs. Standard Oil would lower prices drastically⁹ driving out local oil refiners. They would finance the resulting temporary losses with funds forthcoming from Rockefeller refining plants in the rest of the country. Then, when the local competitor was bankrupted, the Standard Oil supplier would jack up prices astronomically, and use these revenues to finance still other similar takeovers. McGee (1958) demonstrated that as a matter of historical record, this just did not happen. Also, that this scenario was theoretically invalid. All the targeted local supplier needed to do was to temporarily stop operation and then start again when Standard Oil boosted their own prices.

If our local egg farmer is the recipient nation followed through with McGee's (1958) analysis, he would cease selling eggs while their prices hovered at the zero levels; instead he would create more chickens with them. Then, when the Cs stopped their egg "dumping" he would be in a position to make a "killing." There would then be few eggs available, apart from his. He would be able to raise prices up to the level right before that point where they would attract commercial imports from abroad.

Would this actually occur? Not bloody likely. The chicken farmer would be roundly condemned if he did any such thing. He would be accused of price gouging. He might even be imprisoned. *That* is why the recipient country is so poor. *Not* because of the generosity of the Cs, as alleged in Poverty, Inc. Rather, due to the fact that free enterprise does not prevail in the country. If it did, *they* would be the Cs, not the Ds, and donate goods and services to poor nations.¹⁰

This is what entrepreneurship is all about, contrary to Poverty, Inc. The chicken farmer irons out the price oscillations engendered by the Cs. When the latter distribute eggs for free to all and sundry, he pulls out of this market, raising prices to a level higher than they would have been, without this act of his. Then, when the Cs abruptly cease their distribution and prices catapult, he starts in again selling eggs, *lowering* the prices that could otherwise prevail.¹¹ In sharp contrast, when government engages in such speculation, there is no such fail-safe mechanism that tends to ensure a reduction in the standard deviation of prices.

⁹ A different cause, but the identical effect of the C's lowering egg prices by "dumping" them on the underdeveloped country. On "dumping" see Block, 1991; McGee, 1990, 1993, 1994A, 1994B

¹⁰ For the claim that economic freedom accounts for economic development, see Gwartney, 1976; Smith, 1776.

¹¹ If he zigs when he should have zagged, he loses money, and is thus less able to exacerbate price variations in the future.

Another criticism of the Cs is that the Ds will become dependent. Even if so, still, we maintain that in the ex ante sense if not the ex post, the recipient necessarily benefits. Should a law be passed prohibiting the Cs from giving miscellaneous goods to the poor Ds on this ground? If so, and to remain logically consistent, we must ban all sorts of goods from the marketplace. Gambling, addictive drugs and alcohol are obvious choices. But people become dependent on all sorts of other goods and services and we would have to prohibit them all. For example, chocolate, skating, bicycling, the music of Mozart, tobacco, professional sports.¹² Such a course of action would hardly be acceptable with the system of laissez faire capitalism supported by the Acton Institute,¹³ the creators of this economically uninformed film.

But do not poor people become dependent on welfare, unemployment insurance, social security, and other such blandishments of the social justice realms of the political economic spectrum? Would this not, also, apply to what the Cs are doing to the Ds? Yes and no. Yes, these statist programs do indeed foster dependency on their recipients.¹⁴ No, in the sense that there is a disanalogy between statist depredations and the voluntary acts of the Cs. First of all, it is not at all the case that the charitable and governmental sectors of the economy are aligned with each other in contradistinction to the capitalist sector. No, no, no, it is rather free enterprise and charity are on the one side of the barrier and the state is on the other. Both markets and the eleemosynary segments are based voluntary interactions. Only the public sector receives money by the threat of violence (taxation).

Secondly, the government attaches stringent conditions to its distribution, the voluntary sector does not. For example, in welfare, if there was a “man in the house” the welfare “client” would lose all benefits. This did not break up the black family; rather it precluded it from forming in the first place (Murray, 1984). Another instance is unemployment insurance. Here, payments are cut off if the

¹² Don't tell us no one is addicted to the SuperBowl or the World Series

¹³ <https://acton.org/>

¹⁴ Although they too are beneficial to the recipients at least ex ante

recipient takes a job. The religious organizations which mainly give support to the poor (the Cs) impose nothing remotely resembling that pernicious requirement.¹⁵

Then there is the problem of locavorism fomented by this execrable film.¹⁶ Spokesman for it continually inveigh against international trade and urge, instead self-sufficiency. But this is highly problematic. It reckons without the concept of comparative advantage. If people grow their own food, instead of allowing the free market to determine the roles of local and imported supplies, people will be poorer. This position was first attacked by Adam Smith in 1776 and completely demolished by David Ricardo in 1817. Since that time it has been regarded by virtually the entire economics profession that the correct lenses through which to look at international trade is that of comparative advantage.

III. HAGIOGRAPHY

Consider the following excessive praise, which is the veritable tip of the iceberg:

“Winner of over 50 international film festival honors, the \$100,000 Templeton Freedom Award, and the €5,000 Best Documentary Award from the FIFE Environmental Film Festival in Paris.”¹⁷

True, all true, unfortunately.

Consider the following statement (Funfschilling, 2006):

“The film was made by the Acton Institute, a Michigan-based think tank which promotes free enterprise within the framework of Christian theology.”

This is problematic from not one but two perspectives. First, this film does not “promote” free enterprise. Rather, it tears it down. The charitable sector is every

¹⁵ Yes it cannot be denied, churches often require recipients to say a prayer, write a letter of thanks to donors, but this hardly fosters dependency.

¹⁶ For a critique, see Carden, 2008A, 2008B; Desrochers and Shimizu, 2012.

¹⁷ <http://www.pittstate.edu/calendar/event-detail.dot?id=07ecddad-baa4-4c74-a68f-f8fbb066afa1#.WM8VsdLyuM8>

bit as much a part of the free enterprise system as is any other, such as business, corporations,¹⁸ self-employment, lending, borrowing, buying, selling, etc. In what way does “Poverty, Inc.” deprecate laissez-faire capitalism? It does so by attempting to make the case that charitable donations are part of the problem, not the solution, of poverty in the underdeveloped world. Second, charity is part and parcel of “Christian theology.” It is difficult to see how this can be denied. And, yet, the film lambastes Christian churches for giving well-meaning but harmful donations to poor people living in Africa, Latin America and other economically desolated areas.

In the view of Harger (2015):

“The feature-length documentary challenges the prevailing culture of charity and promotes entrepreneurship as a positive alternative to ending world poverty.... the Acton Institute is dedicated to promoting free market principles within the framework of Christian theology.

“It contains good news: the solution to poverty already exists, in the entrepreneurialism of the poor themselves. It also conveys a challenge: to retire the top-down systems of aid delivery that bring as many problems as benefits,’ Lips said.

“‘Poverty, Inc.,’ which covers topics such as international orphanages, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the 2010 Haiti earthquake, TOMS shoes, Bono, and U.S. agricultural subsidies, has already been screened on more than 150 occasions to more than 10,000 people in 16 countries and 22 U.S. states, according to an Acton news release.

A comment on the foregoing: It is difficult to see how this film “promotes entrepreneurship.” Those churches and NGOs, too, are acting entrepreneurially. A more accurate assessment would be that “Poverty, Inc.” supports *some* entrepreneurs, and castigates others. “... promoting free market principles within the framework of Christian theology?” No, it *attacks* the free enterprise principle of charitable giving, which is at the very foundation of Christian theology. “... the entrepreneurialism of the poor?” If they were so entrepreneurial, they would not

¹⁸ Block and Huebert, 2008-2009; Hessen, 1979; Huebert and Block, 2008A, 2008B, 2008C; Klein, 2008

be poor in the first place. “... top-down systems of aid delivery?” The only institution that fits this rubric is the government. And, yet, this film targets, mainly, NGOs and churches, hardly emblematic of anything “top down.” TOMS shoes, is a private company, and Bono a private citizen. Neither actually exemplify anything “top down.’

Bowyer (2015) avers:

“... *Poverty Inc.* really is independent – ideologically speaking. It critically examines an industry the chief product of which is good will and social status (virtually crying out for ‘smug’ emission standards) and attracts more celeb endorsements than soft drinks and weight loss combined. In fact, the poverty industry is the one industry which has such high social status that celebrities actually give money to it, in order to associate their names and faces with it rather than the reverse (which is the usual arrangement). For decades celebrities have been clamoring over one another to be chosen to stand in front of a mic and warble to the world, asking if ‘they know it’s Christmas over there...’ in Africa, and to declare that they are the ones who get to declare, ‘We are the world,’ or, ‘We are the One(s) which will end poverty in our day.’ Second-rate rockers get knighted for being in on stuff like that. The poverty industry oozes good will and social status from every crevice, like oil from shattered shale, only goodness instead of evil hydrocarbons.

“But the big question is, ‘Does it actually work?’ And the almost-as-big question is, ‘Who would we need to talk to in order to get the right answer to the big question?’

“The answers are (in reverse order): ‘The poor themselves,’ and, ‘No, it does not.’

“Poverty Inc. talks to the poor themselves about what the poverty industry has done for them, and it finds that, although emergency aid is welcome and often helpful, the long-term system in which wealthy western powers exclude the global poor from trade and dump hyper-subsidized, western-produced consumer goods on them is of great harm. This system’s victims are (in order of most-to-least harmed): poor nations and US taxpayers. Its chief beneficiaries are (in order of most-to-least benefited) gigantic western agri-businesses and professional NGO executives.”

The present authors stand second to no one in our condemnation of the smug Hollywood socialist stars.¹⁹ But, fair is fair. Here, on one rare occasion, they are not to blame. Rather, the fault lies, here, with the Acton Institute and their

¹⁹ See the South Park episode dedicated to the smugness of Hollywood: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smug_Alert!

economically illiterate film. If private charity is really harmful to its targets, does it also violate their rights? Does this Michigan think tank advocate banning by law all private giving to the poor? That is the logical implication of their screed, and, yet, one wonders whether they would accept this conclusion. Hopefully not. Yes, “...wealthy western powers exclude the global poor from trade” and for this they are quite properly condemned. But that is not the core of this film. Rather, it is that they “dump hyper-subsidized, western-produced consumer goods on them” and that this “is of great harm.” We hereby offer this challenge to the Acton Institute: please “dump” all of the “hyper-subsidized, western-produced consumer goods on” *the present authors*. Let us see if this does us any great “harm.”

According to La (2015): “In some circumstances, supplying outside aid can even contribute to a country’s poverty. As a struggling business owner states in the film, ‘no local business can compete with free.’ When a country receives material aid, local businesses cannot compete with the influx of free items. By the time the aid ends, all local suppliers may be gone, priced out of existence. The movie cites Enersa as one example of this unfortunate effect. Enersa, a Haitian solar panel company, was almost bankrupted after the 2010 Haiti earthquake by donations of solar panels en masse from the developed world.”

Tough on Enersa. Too bad for them.²⁰ They were not good entrepreneurs. The manufactured a product that was outcompeted, just as in the case of the members of the horse and buggy industry, those producing typewriters, hula hoops, the pet rock, and others that were also forced out of business. If the car industry were to suddenly and intermittently cease production, speculators would either stockpile cars for the purpose of arbitrage and/or entrepreneurs would spring up with horse and buggy companies in the meantime.²¹ Just as in any other part of a market economy, Adam Smiths’ invisible hand would guide capital as if by an invisible hand, into the possession of those capitalists who best served consumers with it.

²⁰ Yes, it was a personal (economic) tragedy for them (at least until they got back up onto their feet), but that is part and parcel of being a businessman. There are losses as well as profits. Why should we pity them any more than any other failing concern, and, under capitalism, that is the order of the day. If you can’t stand the heat, stay out of the kitchen.

²¹ Or perhaps other substitutes such as motorcycles, trucks, bicycles, etc.

Debruge (2015) has so much to say about this film; we shall reply on a step by step basis:

Claim 1: *“Provocative doc from Acton Institute fellow examines why those in need aren’t always thankful for giving – and what can be done to better improve their situation. As if poverty weren’t a challenging enough phenomenon unto itself, time has revealed that good intentions by outsiders can in many cases make the problem worse – a cruel irony that serves as the basis of Michael Matheson Miller’s ‘Poverty Inc.,’ an easy-to-understand docu-essay with a tough-to-accept message, especially as it implies that some aid organizations may actually be cashing in on their concern. The idea isn’t to discourage giving, but rather to illustrate how the current paradigm doesn’t work, providing clear examples and practical solutions that serve as a useful conversation-starter flexible enough to enrich discussions everywhere from college campuses to community churches – in addition to activism-oriented film festivals, of course.”*

Response 1: The idea isn’t to discourage giving? This author must have watched a different film other than the one produced by the Acton Institute. If this documentary does not discourage precisely that, then no movie does.

Claim 2: *“Miller’s point could hardly be more apparent than in the case of a Rwandan egg farmer who was just getting his business started when a well-meaning American church decided to send free eggs to his starving countrymen: Overnight, the local entrepreneur found himself unable to sell his own goods in the market, and though locals benefited for a short time, when the church turned its philanthropic attention elsewhere, it had driven the farmer out of business and inadvertently crippled the local egg economy.”*

Response 2: The church most certainly did *not* “drive ... the farmer out of business.” He could have laid low, borrowing a leaf from the non-existent independent oil refiners “exploited” by Standard Oil (McGee, 1958). Then, when the egg cornucopia abruptly stopped, he would have been in the driver’s seat, except for the fact that if he “took advantage” of resulting high egg prices, he would have been accused of “gouging,” and dealt with harshly. *That* is the explanation of Rwandan poverty; lack of free enterprise (Gwartney, 1976; Smith, 1776), not charitable giving.

Claim 3: “This micro-example, relayed anecdotally by an NGO exec and illustrated via rudimentary animation (for lack of an interview with the primary source himself), echoes in many forms over the course of the film, from interviews with small-time business owners whose own Third World endeavors couldn’t compete with a sudden influx of ‘free stuff’ to someone as high-profile as ex-president Bill Clinton, who delivers a mea culpa before Congress after his policy of dumping American-subsidized, tariff-free rice on Haiti wiped out local agriculture: ‘It was a mistake,’ Clinton confesses. ‘I had to live every day with the consequences of the loss of capacity to produce a rice crop in Haiti to feed those people because of what I did.’”

Response 3: Clinton is indeed guilty of many, many economic crimes,²² but this is not one of them.²³ To the contrary, suppose this administration had, instead, “dumped” these agricultural products on any advanced country. Would it have harmed the latter? Of course not. They would have simply resold them elsewhere, where profits from them could be maximized. Yes, Haiti suffered, alright, but not from being “dumped” on; instead, from too much regulation, too little respect for private property rights, etc.

Claim 4: “It feels good to give, Miller acknowledges, and the U.S. and other cultures are to be commended for their awareness of and involvement in Africa since the days when Band Aid and infomercials featuring fly-covered, distended-bellied Ethiopian kids raised the issue of starvation, while giving a misleading impression of Africa as a barren, resource-poor continent. The problem, ‘Poverty Inc.’ cautions, is that few pause to think what happens after they’ve written the check, never fathoming that the mere act of giving can actually have a detrimental effect.”

²² Anderson, 2001; Casselman, 2016; Williamson, 2016

²³ We speak here, only, of the giving to the poor countries of U.S. farm surpluses generated by subsidies; not of the latter.

Response 4: Giving can actually have a detrimental effect? The present authors now offer to give to Debruge the following: a Cadillac car, a Stradivarius violin, a year's supply of beer, a ton of sugar, and a gift certificate for \$10,000 to be used at Wal-Mart. Actually, we make no such offer. We fear that if we did, he would take us up on this "offer" of ours, contrary to his views. In response, he would probably claim that "logical consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds." But, hopefully, this *reductio ad absurdum* will take at least a little wind out of his sails.

Claim 5: "It all comes down to the old 'give a man a fish' vs. 'teach a man to fish' quandary, wherein donations provide a temporary fix, whereas training and help building connections to the world market could empower a way out. First-time helmer Miller hails from the Acton Institute, a free-market think tank with a theological thrust, and though his documentary displays no overt religious leanings, it's decidedly pro-capitalist, implying that the poor's only hope is to earn their way out of their current predicament, when it's clear that the same system hasn't exactly succeeded in eliminating poverty in First World countries. Still, Miller avoids the manipulative tricks of lesser filmmakers, presenting his argument with lucidity and reason. Whereas others give without thinking, 'Poverty Inc.' provides genuine food for thought."

Response 5: Yes, teaching someone to fish is all well and good, but so is *giving* him one. This, too, helps him, at least *ex ante*; otherwise, he would be free to decline this offer. No one is stuffing, whole, a fish down a man's throat and choking him. This act of benevolence is entirely a voluntary one! Giving a man a fish allows him to focus his efforts on additional production elsewhere. For example, a man who was given a fish was then able to craft a hat as he didn't need to fish that day to survive. Then his wealth would be increased by that a hat; we assume that if he was not given a fish he would have spent the day fishing for one. Similarly, if an economy is given a few thousand eggs, yes, domestic egg production will likely fall, but those who were producing eggs who are now crowded out will allocate their labor and capital to something else, and even if their capital is not all general enough to be transferred the key point is that *any and all* of the additional production will be a net gain in goods produced in the economy. The general public should be forgiven for misunderstanding this concept. However the same cannot apply to the supposedly sophisticated Acton Institute, however, we have a great deal of blame to place. For a think tank whose members should be at least familiar with economic concepts, the Candlemakers

Petition should have been taken into account by them. Their ignorance of this text, written over a hundred years ago in 1850, is exemplary of the ignorance of all too many people regarding economics.²⁴ The theory of comparative advantage put forth by David Ricardo as well as the Candlemakers Petition by Frederic Bastiat are both well over 100 years old, and even so both of the fallacious arguments destroyed by their writings are still espoused to this day. Sad.

We now turn to yet another supporter. States Perry (2016): “... there’s lots of ways we can support each other. But flooding the markets with stuff is not one of them.”

Oh yeah? The present authors wish that the market would be flooded with all sorts of “stuff.” We would be far richer than now we are. Did France and Israel suffer when the Germans paid reparations to them? To believe this is to believe anything.

This is part of an interview Perry (2016) did with interview with Mark Weber, a co-producer of the film:

“Perry: Your film highlights the unintended consequences of international aid that is intended to do good. Can you name an example that particularly stands out to you?”

“Weber: The one that really struck me is a story in Haiti of a solar-panel company called Enersa. It was started by two Haitian gentlemen, Jean-Ronel Noel and Alex Georges. They’re Canadian educated. They decided to come back to Haiti to build their country. They saw a tremendous opportunity for renewable energy and harnessing sunlight. They began, kind of the cliché entrepreneurial story, in their garage working with LEDs and things. They eventually grew and grew and grew, built a manufacturing plant, and had been employing a number of people, mostly men, mostly from pretty tough areas of Haiti. It’s an incredible success story of local people driving development in their own country.

²⁴ States Rothbard (1995) in this regard: “It is no crime to be ignorant of economics, which is, after all, a specialized discipline and one that most people consider to be a ‘dismal science.’ But it is totally irresponsible to have a loud and vociferous opinion on economic subjects while remaining in this state of ignorance.”

“Then the earthquake hits, and the factory held up, but it was damaged. Within a couple of weeks, they had it back up and running again. But because of the international relief effort, all of a sudden there was a flood of solar panels coming in from international NGOs to help Haiti. They went from selling 50 solar panels a month to selling five in six months. They were almost decimated by the relief effort.”

We have already, above, had occasion to refer to the plight of Enersa, but could not resist, saying one more time, this is to misconstrue the reality of entrepreneurship. The free market system is one of profit *and* loss. There is nothing, nothing whatsoever, diabolical about one firm, or even many,²⁵ going bankrupt.

V. CONCLUSION

The main criticism of these charitable donations is that they are unreliable, and breed dependency. We find it difficult to agree with this explanation. It is important to define the economic realm to be discussed. For example, an economic analysis of welfare focusing only on the recipients may find the system of governmental redistribution beneficial, while if all members of the economy are considered a very different conclusion might be reached. For the purposes of this paper only the local economies which are recipients of free foreign goods are considered, not in order to be blind to the global economy, but to more closely gain an understanding of the economic phenomena at play when we look closely at a few effects. While looking at economies which are extorted in order to send foreign aid abroad would give us a broader base of understanding, such a paper would not give its readers the same sense of depth.

Consumption Gain

The first, most immediate effect of free goods entering an economy is the gain to

²⁵ Dare we once again mention the sad plight of the horse and buggy industry, or all those laid waste to by the computer revolution?

consumers. If goods are given directly to consumers this gain is obvious - consumers are enabled to consume the free items given to them, while they still have their initial income to be used to consume even more goods. It is difficult to see, at least at the outset, how anyone could consider this first effect detrimental.²⁶ Another possible way goods could be distributed to consumers is through some form of government cronyism on the receiving end of foreign aid. If such goods are given to a local government instead of to consumers directly then the bureaucrats and politicians may very well decide to charge their citizens for the goods meant to be given to them for free. But this form of distribution enhances consumer consumption by increasing supply, thus bidding down the prices of the relevant goods. This allows consumers to purchase more goods with their base income and therefore attain a higher indifference curve.²⁷ Worse, even, than selling the charitable gifts to the populace is the state keeping them for itself. Then, they are more than not likely to be used to defray the costs of the “Three M’s”: monuments, Mercedes and machine guns.²⁸

Producer Displacement

The purported negative effect of the “dumping” of free foreign goods into a receiving economy is the displacement problem. There are multiple ways local producers might be displaced by foreign goods. One possibility is that free goods might be supplied to an economy in a constant flow. An example of this might be a monthly delivery of free shoes to local consumers. While this would most likely put some or all local producers out of business, they would be able to predict such inflows of goods and would therefore be able to reallocate their general capital to other uses while disposing of their specific capital equipment. While the loss of the value of specific capital will be seen as a loss in this scenario, it must be remembered that even if all the capital used by local producers of shoes before the introduction of foreign aid were to have been specific, the local economy still

²⁶ However, this is precisely the contention of the film under discussion.

²⁷ For a critique of this model, see fn. 5 supra

²⁸ The monuments need not be statues of the dictator. They could also be a steel mill, the product of which costs 5 times the price of this product on the world market. The car is the transportation for the cronies of the dictator. And we all know what the third item is all about.

would not suffer a net loss of goods produced as the shoes previously produced by the locals are now being supplied by foreigners. The latter, at the very least gain leisure time, and, presumably, can move over to the production of other goods and services now more needed by consumers.²⁹

The second way free goods might enter an economy is sporadically. In this system of aid goods are bequeathed to the poor at random times in various and continually changing quantities. This increases the amount of uncertainty for local entrepreneurs or business owners in comparison to the first, constant flow method of aid. In this second scenario, the prices of various goods are more volatile. This means that those who invest in businesses must bear more risk, for a sudden surplus of goods in a specific industry would, *ceteris paribus*, reduce profits in that industry.

There are those who will contend, as do the writers for Poverty, Inc. that the poor people in the recipient country would have been better off if the donors had kept their shoes to themselves, and not burdened the third world country with them. To them we ask, suppose there were a hooligan who smashes the free shoes. Would this criminal really help the economy? To think this is to be victimized by the broken window fallacy (Hazlitt, 1946). Is the broken window fallacy false if the windows are coming in for free in random quantities at random times? Of course not. A window is a window is a window, and breaking them, or, destroying shoes, is scarcely a way to help develop an economy.

Why have we been so harsh? If this film were made by Michael Moore or Bernie Sanders or Elizabeth (Pocahontas) Warren we would not have been so critical. We might not have even reviewed it. But this movie comes to us courtesy of the Acton Institute contrast which has as its mission support of the free enterprise system.³⁰ However, voluntary charity is surely a crucial aspect of that

²⁹ This, presumably, is exactly what the horse trainers, whip makers, blacksmiths and members of other occupations displaced by the introduction of the automobile: took position in that or yet other industries. It is apodictically true that those who accept the eggs gain in utility due to revealed preference and utility maximization.

³⁰ On March 15, 2017 it announces itself as “Eliminating poverty through economic freedom.” <https://acton.org/>. Well, what about the economic freedom of the Cs, to give charity to poor people in underdeveloped countries? Part of its mission statement reads as follows: “The Acton Institute is a think-tank whose mission is to promote a free and virtuous society characterized by individual liberty and sustained by religious principles.” But most of the donors of eggs and other such commodities are church groups. What about the religious principle of charity?

institution. This film was given a sizeable monetary award by no less than the Templeton Foundation, which also supposedly also stands for private property rights and free enterprise.³¹ It is one thing when the denizens of the left mislead the public about economic matters. We expect no more and no less from them. But when libertarian advocates of *laissez faire* capitalism do so, we find it necessary to protest, and to do so vociferously.

Supporters of this film want the poor to have a voice. Yes, of course, everyone should have a voice. Free speech (Mill, 1859) and all that. But this is not at all what the advocates of “giving a voice” to the downtrodden have in mind. Rather, they aver, in effect, that the poverty-stricken have something of substance to contribute to their own rescue from their economic affliction. But given that this is the case, an immediate objection arises. If the poor are so full of information about curing poverty; if they know so much about addressing their plight, why are they so deprived in the first place. And a corollary. Given that they are enmeshed in paucity, could it be, could it possibly be, that they really know little about the causes of economic development? After all, while medical patients, too, should be given “a voice” in their own care, it would be the rare commentator who would assert that they know more about attaining good health than the surgeon who is their doctor. Yes, there is a strong albeit imperfect analogy—between the sick and the poor. Neither relishes their present condition. Both wish to change their situation for the better. Neither knows quite how to do so on their own, otherwise, strong assumption coming up, they would have already altered their situation for the better.

One last point. This film nowhere mentions the sainted name of Peter Bauer.³² Doing a presentation on foreign aid while entirely ignoring him is like covering

³¹ <https://www.templeton.org/>

³² Bauer, 1981, 1982, 1984, 1991; Bauer and Yamey, 1957. In the spirit of this author, let us say the following: We only oppose government to government transfers of wealth, commonly mischaracterized as foreign “aid.” Our analysis of private donations, the target of Moyo and *Poverty Inc.*, is entirely different. The latter is part of the free enterprise system, not the former. When statism rears its ugly head in this context, we arrive at the “3Ms”: monuments (they need not be a statue of the dictators, although typically they are; they can also include a steel mill which produces this product at five times the international price), Mercedes (the dictator’s transportation) and machine guns (we all know what those are for.)

Objectivism without mentioning Ayn Rand, or libertarianism while excluding Murray Rothbard and Ron Paul, or Austrian economics without including, Carl Menger, Eugen von Bohm-Bawerk, Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich A. Hayek and Murray Rothbard. It is not merely an oversight. It is an insult.

Another last point. Bill Gates goes so far as to characterize (Moyo, 2009) as “evil” and “promoting evil.”³³ We entirely support Mr. Gates in this assessment, not only of that book, but, also, and for the self-same reasons, the movie “Poverty, Inc.”³⁴ Suppose there were a “bad” Bill Gates. Well, there is, a purposefully evil George Soros. What would he do? He would give money to poor people, with the express purpose of making them economically listless, dependent upon them; they would refuse to take jobs, given the largesse he showers down upon them.³⁵ Then, when the recipients have had their human capital atrophied, this donor ends his money transfers, leaving the helpless. But, this evil monster attained his fortune in the first place through purely voluntary means, and does not now involve government in any way in these charitable donations of his.³⁶ How would we assess such occurrences? Would this then amount to a market failure? No, not a bit of it. All we could say is that these transfers of funds would be beneficial to both parties in the *ex ante* sense, but not *ex post*, at least to the receiver. But this no more constitutes market failure than when a businessman errs, and loses money, in the commercial for profit sector of the economy. This is merely an aspect of the free enterprise system. Errors occur. Had the recipients known of the effects upon them, they might well not have agreed to accept the funds. Voluntary interaction is necessarily beneficial to both parties only *ex ante*. This obtains, usually, *ex post* also, but not always. This would be a counter example.

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³³ From the context of his remarks, we infer that Gates was assessing the book, not its author, in this critical manner.

³⁴ For an (erroneous and unwarranted) support of Moyo (2009), see Stevo (2010).

³⁵ Many very wealthy men fear giving their young impressionable children too much money too soon, lest this sort of thing have these very negative effects upon them.

³⁶ But suppose he did. Posit, that is, that this donor somehow involved the state apparatus in his nefarious scheme to undermine the skills of recipients in poor countries. Then, he would be not a crony capitalist but the equivalent in the charitable sector. He would then be a crony donor. We owe this point to Larry Beane.

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THE MORAL DECISION. FROM *PHRONESIS* TO ETHICAL COMPETENCE

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ABSTRACT.

The Aristotelian idea of φρόνησις (*phronesis*) is an invaluable resource to help amending the limits of deontological and consequentialist theories. It permits to free the moral decision from rules and *standard* principles and to give contextual motivations. The ethical competence, as a process of construction of moral judgment aimed to give reason for our choices, is a contemporary development of this intuition.

KEYWORDS

Ethics monism, phronesis, heterogeneity of morality, moral judgment, ethical competence.

1. LIMITS OF ETHICS MONISM

The two most influential theories in moral philosophy from the end of the XVIII century are the Kantianism and the utilitarianism.

They have been usually considered as rival theories, but actually they converge on some aspects and they point out common limits¹. Actually, these two methods give different answers to the attempt to developing a *standard* decision procedure to resolve moral dilemmas, since what is considered as ethically decisive in a lifespan field should enjoy the same consideration in other fields.

Finally, the kantianism and the utilitarianism share the idea that there is a unique moral principle able to orient and justify our choices. According to the

¹ See F. Manti, *Bíos e pólis. Etica, politica, responsabilità per la vita*, Genova University Press, Genova 2012, pp. 15 - 18

kantianists, the moral decision is deontological, while according to the utilitarianists it is consequentialist; according to the former all moral obligations are categorical (binding *a priori*), according to the latter they are not. Both the decision models are characterized by their ethics monism.

This led to neglect the moral judgement as the ability to correlate principles or general rules to specific contexts, and has led – for example - to consider controversial ideals of the person founded on the autonomy (Kant) or the experimentalism towards different forms of life (J. S. Mill), as the basis of the liberal neutrality², and it has elided the moral conflict as the typical dimension of the morality.

Even the contemporary reports, as the reports by Rawls and Harsanyi, are not so persuasive when trying to overcome the aforementioned limits. It is not possible here to discuss analytically the question³.

Extremely and partially summarized:

1. Rawls' contractarianism and the utilitarianism follow different decision rules, but both the *maximin* rule and the principle of the medium social utility with related axioms and social welfare, reduce ethics to a branch of the Rational Choice Theory.

2. The divergence concerns the “moral algebra” that has to be used. Harsanyi does not challenge the original position as an analytical tool to be used in order to define the justice criteria and other aspects of morality, but he opposes the Bayesian calculus (with the principle of equiprobability) to the *maximin* rule.

3. In my opinion, both the aforementioned theories are subjected to at least three criticisms able to question their own structure:

- a. Any calculus procedure of the Game Theory can take into account that morality has to manage a plurality of factors coming from specific contexts and with contextual and biographical dimensions.

- b. The requirements imposed by the rationality of the calculus make marginal the psychological and the emotional dimensions which have – on the contrary – a relevant impact on orientations and conducts.

² I do not discuss here the questions related to the relationship between ethics and politics. I only want to underline how monistic moral theories have insisted on giving an ethical justification and not only a political justification of the principle of neutrality. For an in-depth analysis, see F. Manti, La neutralità politica come principio deontologico, in *Etica & Politica/Ethics & Politics*, vol. 17, n. 3, 2015, pp. 247-261

³ For an in-depth analysis see F. Manti, *Bios e polis, op. cit.* pp.18 - 41

c. The Rational Choice Theory is based on basic conditions of internal consistency (axiom of contraction and axiom of expansion) which limit the decision to this consistency. This limit is excessive and inadequate when applied to moral and social decisions⁴.

Even the revision of the theory of justice proposed by Rawls in *Political Liberalism* arrives at a theory of decision based on the overlapping consensus that does not respond convincingly to the need to relate general principles and rules to specific contexts in order to obtain indications to face and – if possible – resolve moral dilemmas. As a matter of fact, the object of this consensus is restricted to the basic structure of a well-organized society⁵.

2. AN INTUITION OF ARISTOTLE

As defined by C. Larmore, an invaluable resource to help amending the limits of deontological and consequentialist theories, is given by the Aristotelian idea of φρόνησις (*phronesis*)⁶, which is fundamental to understand what is the moral judgement, since it permits to free the moral decision from rules and *standard* principles and to give contextual motivations.

Before defining the idea of φρόνησις, Aristotle gives a methodological indication related to the arguments concerning human behaviours and, precisely, referring to their precision. Though φρόνησις is a dianoetic virtue, they are not epistemic, since they do not affirm an incontrovertible truth, but «[...] ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ [...]»⁷, that is «mostly». Their grade of truth is approximate

⁴ See A. Sen, *Rationality and Freedom*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, London England, pp.121 -157; F. Manti, *Scelte di mercato. Una teoria della decisione ragionevole*, in AA.VV., *Etica ed economia il binomio possibile*, Sentieri Meridiani, Foggia 2010, pp. 29 - 35. In particular, the internal consistency required by these axioms is not able to take into account real context conditions characterized by their dynamism or variations (always possible) in the information we have (see A. Sen, Internal Consistency of Choice, *Econometrica*, Vol. 61, N.3, pp. 495 - 521). Outside the assumption of situations with a high level of abstraction, as the original position, the calculus that follows the internal consistency axioms of the Rational Choice Decision shows all its limits. This is true also for a probabilistic calculus as the one of the function of the average utility (or function of social utility) since it is influenced by the attribution of values of utility to the different individual utilities. Harsanyi, though, does not have difficulties to accept the original position as a sort of heuristic assumption able to clarify several aspects of morality.

⁵See J Rawls, *Political Liberalism*. Expanded Edition, Columbia University Press, New York, 2005, pp. 133 – 172. For a discussion on the consent by intersection, see F. Manti, *Bios e polis*, *op. cit.*, pp. 74 - 80

⁶ See C. Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity*, Cambridge University Press, p. xii

⁷Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 1094 b 21

also because if we start from preconditions carrying these traits, the conclusions have to be of the same type. Therefore, the precision of our expressions in this field is as high as permitted by the nature of the object.

The following example is illuminating: «παραπλήσιον γάρ φαίνεται μαθηματικοῦ τε πιθανολογοῦντος ἀποδέχεσθαι καὶ ῥητορικὸν ἀποδείξεις ἀπαιτεῖν.»⁸. That is: expecting precision from “mostly” preconditions «would be, more or less, admitting that a mathematician counts on persuasion and a rhetorician on rigorous demonstrations.».

Therefore, judgement is not elaborated thanks to general rules but taking into account the context in which we act: « [...] τὰ πρὸς τὸν καιρὸν σκοπεῖν [...] »⁹.

This also means that moral judgment does not have to deal with formal rules, but with life activities where examples, experiences, education have a fundamental role. The φρόνησις allows us to choose the best behavior in every context. Aristotle specifies how it is a customary state of mind, accompanied by reason and addressed to action, which pertains to what is good or evil for man¹⁰. The good action, therefore, is, in itself, an aim (ἔστι γὰρ αὐτὴ ἡ εὐπραξία τέλος)¹¹. It follows that, according to Aristotle, there is a connection between truth and good. In summary, φρόνησις, like all the dianoetic virtues, allows us to reason correctly and approximate the truth: the logos recognizes what is true and so desire accords to it. The ὀρθὸς λόγος (orthós lógos), that is the right reason, is therefore to deliberate what we have the most reason to do as appropriate to the context in which we are and to the promotion of good life¹².

The dissertation on φρόνησις, proposed by Aristotle in the VI Book of *Nicomachean Ethics*¹³, on a hand further specifies his vision of this virtue, on the other hand it underlines some difficulties.

⁸ Ivi, I, 1094 b 25 - 27

⁹ Ivi, II, 1104 a 9

¹⁰ J. Annas proposed to translate φρόνησις with intelligence. It concerns good life in general. See J. Annas, *The Moral of Happiness*, Oxford University Press, New York - Oxford 1993, pp. 73-74

¹¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, 1140 b 7

¹² See ivi, VI, 1140 to 27- 28. For a closer look at the subject, see M. Mangini, *Etica democratica. Una riflessione sui valori etici nella società liberale*, Giappichelli, Torino 2013, pp. 61 - 64 e pp. 69 - 72. For a different interpretation, from the one I propose, of the ὀρθὸς λόγος understood as reasoning capable of correctly deriving from the first and universal principles of being coherent conclusions of a logical and ontological order, see L. Clavell, La presenza di Aristotele nell'enciclica Fides et ratio, in S. L. Brock (ed), *L'attualità di Aristotele*, Armando, Roma 2000, p. 162

¹³ See ivi, VI, 1140 a 24 - 1140 b 30

By the way, I consider very interesting that – in spite of what happens with σοφία (*sophia*) – Aristotle does not give a real definition of φρόνησις but – in order to understand it – he refers to people considered as wise. Aristotle textually affirms: «Πεπὶ δὲ φρονήσεως οὕτως ἂν λάβομεν τοὺς φρονίμους»¹⁴. Wise is he who has the ability to decide what is good or is appropriate¹⁵ to him, not in a specific field, but in general, for a good life. His characteristic is the ability to decide « [...] εἴη φρόνιμος ὁ βουλευτικός »¹⁶, since he does not demonstrate. The demonstration regards what cannot be different from what actually is, while the demonstration requires to evaluate and discuss the principles that can be different from what they actually are. When we refer to our behaviours, we talk about things that « [...] ἐνδεχέται καὶ ἄλλως ἔχειν »¹⁷, can be different. Therefore, wise are people who can judge (θεωρεῖν) upon what is good for themselves and for other men.

It is evident that with this statement Aristotle wants to specify that wisdom regards the decision related to other people too, underlining – with the example referred to Pericles – the political dimension in addition to the ethical dimension¹⁸.

Once defined the conditions where the moral judgment is acquired and its function, we have to answer to the question related to the modalities through which we build it or to the way we exercise this faculty. Aristotle gives us two clues: the theory of mediety and the practical syllogism.

With regard to the further, we have to underline this passage « Ἔστιν ἄρα ἡ ἀπετὴ ἕξις προαιρετική, ἐν μεσότητι οὔσα τῇ πρὸς ἡμᾶς, ὠρισμένη λόγῳ καὶ ᾧ ἂν ὁ φρόνιμος ὀρίσειεν »¹⁹.

Without considering refined philological debates, in my opinion ὠρισμένη is referred to mediety toward ourselves and is made possible by the ὀρθὸς λόγος. In other words, virtue consists in the ability to appropriately face the requirements which emerge from a determined situation, avoiding excesses of any kind.

¹⁴ See *ivi*, VI, 1140 a 24

¹⁵ Aristotle uses the words τὰ συμφέποντα which can be also translated as what is useful, convenient, beneficial

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, 1140 a 26 – 27. The use of the word βουλευτικός is relevant because it indicates also the use of the ability of political decision. (See Aristotle, *Politica*, 1260 a 12)

¹⁷ *Ivi*, VI, 1140 a 35

¹⁸ See *ivi*, 1140 b 7-11

¹⁹ *Ivi*, II, 1106 b 36 – 1107 a 1-2 «Virtue, so, is a disposition that orients decision following a mediety towards ourselves, defined by reason and as defined by he who is wise»

Aristotle underlines also that it is difficult to practice ethical virtues as mediety. It is difficult to look for and find the middle path as it is difficult to find the centre of the circle: it is not for all, but only for he who has a full knowledge (εἰδότης) of the subject.

He also underlines some rules of behaviour able to define what really is the mediety towards ourselves²⁰, but, as Larmore argues: «[...]only judgement can shape their vagueness and transform them in significant provisions.»²¹.

In the III Book of *Nicomachean Ethics*, when analysing the deliberation²² (βουλή and βούλευσις)²³ and giving causes for reflection on the practical reasoning, Aristotle does not give indications on its form and if and to which extent is it oriented by considerations concerning virtue. The moral decision, as said, regards cases that “mostly” happen, whose result is uncertain, and where there is indefiniteness.

In this context of ideas, Aristotle identifies the syllogistic type of the structure of the moral decision (which we do not have to forget has a contextual character and does not concern the aims but the means which conduct to the aims). This structure is as follows:

Major premise: what is considered as what has to be done

Minor premise: means through which I do what I affirmed in the major premise (given the context)

Conclusion: the accomplished aim

It is evident that the premises imply the moral judgment and that it precedes and permits to formulate the premises from which the conclusion is inferred. In the light of these considerations, we think that Larmore is right when he affirms that the practical syllogism cannot be considered as a model able to explain how the moral judgment works²⁴.

3. THE HETEROGENEITY OF MORALITY

The modern alternatives to the Aristotelian intuition regarding the moral judgement do not seem convincing. The third formulation of the Kantian categorical imperative and the idea of a moral algebra able to calculate which

²⁰ See *ivi*, II, 1109 b 2 - 26

²¹ C. Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity*, op. cit., p. 18

²² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, III, 1112 a 18 – 1113 a 14

²³ The two words cannot be considered as synonyms

²⁴ See C. Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity*, op. cit., p. 8

is the decision that produces more social wellness, respond to the same requirement: determining the moral obligation in the light of a unique and universally valid impartial principle as rationally justifiable, the deontological principle or the consequentialist principle of utility. The critics that Rawls moves to the utilitarianism and the critics by Harsanyi to the deontological neo-contractualism of the further underline (both and mutually) the limits of the ethical monism, whichever its declination is. I think therefore as sharable what said by Larmore:

The correct point of view, in my opinion, is that there is the deontological reasoning, the consequentialist reasoning, and both are valid ways of morally reasoning. The mistake made by both the utilitarianists and Kantianians consists in claiming that only one of these principles can be licit. And I think that it can exist more than a moral reasoning and that we have to admit the multiplicity of these ways²⁵.

The existence of a multiplicity of ways of reasoning on the right action to do in order to pursue other people's good, implies the acknowledgement of the heterogeneity of the moral as a matter of fact of our experience. Depending on the contexts, we decide and choose moral actions giving deontological or consequentialist reasons.

This experience also shows that not always the moral decision requires impartiality. There are some peculiar categories of people, groups or individuals with whom we have special relationship that can be related to ways of life like interests: toward these people we can act in a preferential way in determined circumstances and conditions, justifying these preferential actions.

Therefore, we should place side by side to the deontological and consequentialist principles the principle of partiality «[...] following which we have to respect the specific and particular relationships we have towards the others and we have to act for their good in the light of these special bonds we have with them.»²⁶.

In addition, always in the light of our moral experience, it is possible to note that, in our social relationships, we are asked to justify some decisions determined not only by considerations on principles, but also by the convergence of contextual factors (included education and tradition), intersubjective and negotiation relationships, motivations generated from our moral loyalties, our "moral feelings" and emotions.

²⁵ C. Larmore, *Dare ragioni*, Rosenberg & Sellier, Torino 2008, p. 34 (The text has been published only in Italian since it is the report of a lesson, authorized by the Author)

²⁶ Ivi, p. 37

Our moral experience shows that we have to face daily obligations like keeping promises, be honest, return others what we owe them, whose rules do not require in many occasions a particular processing on the moral side.

Other obligations like - for example - being benevolent, generous or fair, require a reflection on “when do we have to follow them, how can we realize them, which consequences will have our actions on the others”: in other words, they require the processing of the moral judgement. There are also circumstances where the moral judgement is solicited or induced by passions, or, as we say nowadays, by emotions. The emotional impact of situations like suffering, inequality, etc. can contribute to generate a moral reflection on how should we act to avoid them or, at least, to limit their impacts. Aristotle had foreseen a relation between good and passions to the point that he thought that sometimes they could even coincide²⁷. Friendship with ourselves is considered in itself as a mutual agreement among reason and passions²⁸. The vast majority of modern ethics has elided passions from the moral dimension. Thanks to the philosophers of the *moral sense* like Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hume, A. Smith, the emotional dimension of the moral has been underlined, to the point that Hume could consider passions (at that time passion meant emotion) as the ground where morality grows.

Among these philosophers, he who underlined more than others the importance of the moral judgement was A. Smith. Apart from underlining that justice rules are the only rules of morality to be precise, while the rules regarding virtues are unprecise, vague and undetermined he also underlined that virtues are connected with a general rule or with a way of acting, and, at the same time, integrated with the moral feeling proper of each of them.

This feeling is exposed to several changes depending on the contexts. A. Smith has defined sympathy as the ability of putting yourself in someone else's shoes and to care for his/her wellbeing, that is the moral sentiment *par excellence*²⁹.

Referring explicitly to Hume and A. Smith, Hoffman has proposed an interesting theory of the relationship among empathy and moral development. His thesis is that even if the empathetic moral can explain many aspects of pro-social behaviour, a moral theory needs to be referred to some moral principles.

²⁷ See Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, VII, 12, 1245 b 1-2

²⁸ See Aristotle, *Magna Moralia*, II, 11, 1211 a 33 - 37

²⁹ See A. Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002, pp. 11- 18,

The relationship between empathetic affections and moral principles is orthogonal³⁰.

For example, empathy implies the ability of putting yourself in someone else's shoes, so it is orthogonal with the respect of individuals' rights, though producing a deep motivation to justice. An observer can be motivated by empathy to help a person and, at the same time, feeling it as a duty because he takes care of the others.

With regard to the three fundamental principles of morality, empathy is orthogonal with the deontological principle, since we feel that helping a person in trouble is our moral duty (putting ourselves in his shoes); empathy is orthogonal with the consequentialist principle because we take the responsibility of our actions thinking about the consequences of our actions and about how we could feel in the same situation; and it is orthogonal with the partiality principle, when we take into account the particular "familiarity" and sharing we have with other people.

To sum up: if the majority of moral dilemmas raises empathy because they imply visible and invisible victims, present or future, orthogonality among empathy and moral principles allows to weaken the *biasto* which the further is subjected, to activate the moral imagination and to elaborate the judgement.

Even if the moral judgement is not completely determined by rules, it «[...] is not arbitrary. [...] We do not judge blindly, but reacting to the particular given situation, on the basis of some reasons.»³¹.

So we should pay serious attention not only to the different elements of the moral judgement, but also to the process through which we formulate it. It is also because we are aware of this process that we can give reasons to ourselves and to others for our decisions.

4. THE ETHICAL COMPETENCE

The elaboration of the moral judgement and the concrete practice of the decisional process implied by a particular judgement can be defined as ethical competence. There are many and problematic definitions of competence³². I think that the definition by Cepollaro is very interesting: according to him "competences are not things"³³. Nor they are notions or skills, even if they

³⁰ M.L. Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000, p. 221

³¹ C. Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity*, op. cit., p. 22

³² See P.G. Bresciani, *Capire la competenza*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 2012

³³ G. Cepollaro, *Le competenze non sono cose*, Guerini e Associati, Milano 2008

imply both of them. To understand their nature, it is possible to define them as emergent properties relational, connected to uses and contexts. This means that these competences emerge from real intersubjective practises³⁴.

Being related to fluxes of communication, competences are dynamic and cannot be reduced to the conditions of their emergence. This implicates their retroactivity with regard to the initial conditions and the transformation of these conditions.

Therefore, competences are not “things” or “sets” that can be learnt and applied to a system, since their fundamental characteristic is that they are related to a context, locals, situated, evolving in the contexts where they emerge. They contribute to the evolution of the contexts by generating new ones. So interpreted, competences can be seen as a *bricolage* of knowledge and ability to act in determined contexts, where they represent knowledge in action and the ability to use given resources.

With regard to the ethical competence, this is a basic competence, since it is transverse and influential on more specific competences. Since the moral dilemmas regard intersubjective relationships in determined contexts, the ethical competence emerges as an answer - as taking the responsibility of these dilemmas.

More in details, it consists in the definition of which ethics fundamental principles have to be endorsed in a specific context, taking also into account the orthogonality with the emotions and, first of all, with empathy.

In addition, acting in a way ethically driven, when there are dilemmas or moral conflicts, can contribute to determine a moral co-evolution of the interested subjects or, at least, if there is not a possible solution, to formulate and/or recognize rules and ways of conflict management and cohabitation.

The ethical competence is, therefore, an expression of the dynamic-cultural and operative balance people can find among themselves and the context and it is done by subjects who can diagnose the environment where they operate and produce complex performances, actions, relations adequate to the context itself on the basis of the decisions they have to justify.

Inside complex organizations, the ethical competence requires to take into account *stakeholders'* needs, to choose, after reflecting, priorities, having in mind a generative vision of ethics that should be implemented and supported by all, but especially, by he who has directive functions and responsibilities.

A deep moral sense endorses the development of clear and positive relationships among all the *stakeholders*. As said by Damon, morality is not a constraining power that forces people to be honest and to avoid problems, but,

³⁴See *ivi*, p. 30

on the contrary, it realizes a fecund source of motivation, inspiration and innovation³⁵. Therefore, choices and behaviours founded on moral decisions strengthen negotiation and cooperation and generate influential relationships able to determine the well-being for all *stakeholders* in a structured system.

5. MORAL DECISION AND LIMITS OF ETHICAL COMPETENCE

Since now I have underlined the different “elements” of the moral judgment, the complexity of the process of its construction that results in the ethical competence. I was not able to propose a definition. Due to the fact that it does not imply the mere compliance to rules, a *standard* definition looks like impossible. As said, the moral judgement is not arbitrary, since we answer to emergences in particular situations on the basis of some reasons. The moral decision implicates a judgement that merges rationality requests with moral sentiments, the biographical dimension and the experiences of each of us, and the context where it has to be made. This means that, when formulating the moral judgement, it is not requested a theoretical rationality nor a generic reference to empathy (or to other moral sentiments), but a practical sensibleness able to merge rationality and empathy. In addition, it is also thanks to the awareness of the process through which we elaborate a moral judgement that we give reasons, to ourselves and to others, of the decisions we make.

The deontological, consequentialist and partiality principles can be identified as the fundamental principles of the moral. Above them, we have to face other moral principles like the principle of promptness, beneficiality, justice, responsibility, respect for autonomy etc. Let me define the first principles, which are fundamental, as first order principles, while the others can be grouped in a second order.

In fact, we use the latter on the basis of deontological, consequentialist or partiality considerations.

Our moral experience is complex since, in the light of the heterogeneity of the moral, it merges a plurality of factors. The judgment is expressed on the basis of the definition of a hierarchy among the fundamental principles of the moral (deontological, consequentialist, partiality), which is elaborated, from time to time, taking into account the context where we have to act. This choice guides the use of some principles which I define as second order principles (freedom, beneficiality, justice, etc.) and it contributes to give reasons for our

³⁵ See, W. Damon, The Moral Advantage, in *Optimize* 2002, <http://www.optimize.com/issue/003/ethics.htm>.

actions. For example, I can believe to act for the right because I am pursuing an obligation or because I am evaluating the consequences of what I am going to do.

The reference to this or that principle, pertaining to the first order or to the second order, can be guided by factors like empathy, biographic experiences, cultural tradition, negotiating needs, relational needs or even by a mix of these factors. Since – as I tried until now to demonstrate – we do not decide on ethically relevant issues following formal criteria of internal consistency following our preferences, but we decide to take into account a plurality of factors like information and evaluations related to the context where we have to decide, when we have to give reasons for our actions (to ourselves and to others) we need to refer to a contextual principle of justification that could be formulated as follows:

We are requested to give reasons for decisions, choices and actions in the light of the ways through which we arrive to recognize the priority to one of the principles of the first order and we connect them to the principles of the second order, taking into account the specific context where we are situated when deciding.

The moral judgment, in itself, is not able to overcome the moral conflict nor it is always expressible. It has to face the rational conflict that can be considered as the effect of the limits of our reason. Even if we try hard to give reasons, a profound moral dilemma can be irresolvable and so it represents a conflict. For example, the urgency reasons that can be invoked to sustain priority in the consequentialist principle could not necessarily be of the same intensity for everybody.

Larmore affirms that when consequentialist reasons are in conflict with deontological reasons of the strictest type, we should suspend the judgment on which of the two principles represents an obligation for us (but we have to decide which of the two principles we want to follow)³⁶. So he proposes a sort of *epochè* (suspension of judgement) when we think that we could have more information that could modify our view of the situation. The problem is that we cannot always have access to more information related to a conflict. Sometimes we have to admit that there are some irresolvable conflicts. This can happen in the relationship with others, but even with the relationship with ourselves. This is the case when we feel obliged to act in the light both of the deontological principle and of the consequentialist principle, since both of them require actions we think as acceptable, but indeed mandatory. In these

³⁶ C. Larmore, *op. cit.*, p. 149

cases – as said by Larmore – we do not have a deficit in our knowledge, but, on the contrary, we know too much, that is, we know that we are obliged to do the action that we consider the best one from both the deontological and the consequentialist points of view³⁷.

Are we facing a defeat? Does admitting the heterogeneity of the moral implicate the impossibility to decide? Should we come back to foundationalist morals? Let us start with this last question.

Firstly, I would say that rationally recognizing that we do not infer the fundamental principles of the moral but actually we find them, and that these represent the undeniable connections enabling us to look at ourselves as moral agents – whichever our vision of good life is – does not implicate any metaphysic of the moral subject, nor the need to look for foundations outside the moral itself.

In this regard, the principle of contextual justification recalls the fact that whichever the justification we give to our actions is, it has to be referred to a specific context. This means that, even if the moral principles justify actions, they do not have justifications since they represent assumptions of our rationality. I agree on Larmore's idea following which the fundamental principles, having the aforementioned characteristics, establish the limits of the moral intelligibility³⁸.

In this regard, I think that we have to add another reflection: when facing an irresolvable moral conflict and the necessity to decide, we have to acknowledge that there are some obligations we cannot respect, so that moral decisions where fundamental principles are in conflict are always difficult. Among the contexts as they are and as they ought to be, there is our ability to do things, but we have to be aware that «Our possibilities in the world are then too narrow for what we know we ought to do»³⁹.

I do not think this represents a defeat: on the contrary this represents the realistic acknowledgement of our limits, of the necessity to know them and to face them constantly.

This is the conclusion of the journey that has taken us from φρόνησις to ethical competence, thanks to which we have seen how is it possible to build the moral judgement and which are its limits.

Aristotle had a great intuition when putting the judgment at the core of the moral reflection and even if he has nothing to say to us with regard to the heterogeneity of the moral, and even if the φρόνιμος does not correspond to he

³⁷ Ivi, p. 150

³⁸ Ibidem

³⁹ Ibidem

who is ethically competent ⁴⁰, it contributes, still today, to remind us that this centrality does not involve the eclipse of the role of the reason. The idea of practical reasonableness, that is involved in the practise of the ethical competence, is connected with Aristotle's intuition and represents an alternative to the ethical monism and to the Rational Choice Theory in a social and relational ethics perspective.

⁴⁰ Φρόνιμος is he who can decide on the good life in general, while the ethics competence is situated, contextual and does not imply nor a vision of the good life in itself, nor a perfectionistic idea of human nature. As J. Annas points out, « [...] Plato and Aristotle, insist that working for a living was incompatible with developing the virtues; Thus virtue and skill, would not naturally be considered as forming aspects of the same life.». (J. Annas, op.cit., P.72). Ethical competence, on the contrary, allows to deal with moral dilemmas emerging from professional practices

GLI STORICI E I SELVAGGI

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I consider some historical development of anthropology in the early modern age and the problem of methodology. I propose to distinguish five basic groups of problems which overlap occasionally, but significantly. On this basis, I further analyse the debate between two distinguished Italian researchers, Giuliano Gliozzi and Sergio Landucci, reconstructed by Landucci himself in a recent revised edition of his *I filosofi e i selvaggi*. Both researchers shared a critical attitude towards the early stances of historians of ideas; yet they developed rather different methodologies and were both scrupulous enough to revise them when necessary. It is argued that although a highly complex theme like early anthropology requires the conjoined efforts of a multiplicity of disciplines, their specific methodologies should be carefully kept apart.

KEYWORDS

History of philosophy, history of ideas, anthropology, Sergio Landucci, Giuliano Gliozzi.

1. CINQUE PROBLEMI E UNA PROPOSTA

Il titolo del presente lavoro richiede forse un chiarimento preliminare: quello che ci si propone è una riflessione sul metodo tra storia della filosofia e storia delle idee in quanto si applicano a temi caratteristici della riflessione sull'antropologia moderna. Oltre che su una rilettura a distanza degli studi di Giuliano Gliozzi, il discorso è condotto a margine della nuova, recente edizione del volume *I filosofi e i selvaggi* di Sergio

Landucci (1972¹, 2014²): di qui, in breve, il titolo adottato. Non sarebbe improprio affermare che questi due studiosi si sono distinti per aver battuto alcune importanti vie – e averne aperte di altre – della ricerca sulle origini della riflessione antropologica moderna. Ma questo indiscusso riconoscimento va circostanziato alla luce della strutturale ambivalenza, anzi polivalenza del termine antropologia. Meglio chiarire dunque senza indugi a cosa ci riferiremo di preciso nel prosieguo. Poche discipline, in effetti, potrebbero vantare altrettanti padri quanti ne vanta l'antropologia. Un'incursione nella vasta e metodologicamente variegata letteratura di riferimento induce ben presto alla vertigine: senza troppo sforzo vi si troveranno elencati nel ruolo di padre fondatore dell'antropologia i nomi di Hobbes, Montaigne, Pascal, Rousseau, Vico, Herder, von Humboldt (entrambi, e separatamente, beninteso), Waitz o Kant tra i filosofi; per non dire degli scienziati, da Linneo a Blumenbach, da Edwards a Broca (lasciando da parte Darwin, che fa storia a sé), o dei numi tutelari dell'antropologia culturale, si chiamino poi Kames o Tyler –volendo tenersi alti, per non arrivare a un Boas. Il problema, chiaramente, consiste nella fin troppo fertile polisemia di un termine – 'antropologia' – che tende irrimediabilmente a sfuggire nell'infinito. Ciò impone una preliminare scelta di campo: limitazione senza la quale non è possibile pronunciare nemmeno le prime parole di questa pur affascinante vicenda. A lungo, del resto, nella cultura europea, 'antropologia' non è stato il nome di una vera e propria disciplina quanto l'indice di una dichiarazione d'intenti, spesso polemica e non di rado contraddittoria. E anche quando il magma concettuale dell'antropologia si è infine raffreddato: vale a dire per noi, oggi, che abbiamo punti di riferimento che almeno sotto il profilo semantico sono abbastanza precisi – 'antropologia' designa l'antropologia culturale, nel senso inaugurato dalla scuola britannica e americana; mentre vi è un' 'antropologia filosofica' con la quale si intende tutt'altra cosa – anche ora, si diceva, non è con ciò stesso divenuto più facile guardare indietro, e tirare le fila della ricostruzione storiografica.

Come uno degli oggetti impossibili usciti dalla matita di qualche abile artista a sfidare il nostro sistema percettivo, allo sguardo dello storico il nodo *antropologia* si stringe sempre più su se stesso rischiando a volte di abbracciare più o meno l'intera cultura europea, in altri casi di non stringere niente. L'antropologia, per lo storico, è uno spettro che appare e torna a celarsi per ricomparire in modi e luoghi inaspettati. Nella

conseguente difficoltà a definire non solo l'oggetto, ma addirittura il terreno dell'indagine, non sorprende che la tentazione delle scorciatoie sia molto attraente. Un tratto di penna, ed ecco l'antropologia del filosofo separata da quella dello scienziato, quella del biologo da quella dello studioso delle culture, quella del viaggiatore da quella del moralista, quella del letterato da quella dello studioso delle razze, delle lingue, delle religioni. E' opportuno, potremmo chiedere, operare in questo modo? E' legittimo?

Naturalmente, ci sono ottime ragioni per distinguere un problema complesso nelle sue parti componenti: ma anche senza scomodare la teoria della Gestalt, si ricorderà che persino Cartesio, tra i primi moderni a formalizzare esplicitamente questo metodo, consigliava una successiva sintesi ricognitiva. E così, qualunque sia l'approccio metodologico che si privilegia, non è ozioso chiedersi se nell'antropologia moderna sia rintracciabile un percorso che ne leghi le diverse anime, i diversi linguaggi, i diversi metodi, le diverse prospettive. Non si tratta di un'impresa facile, evidentemente, ma per il successo dell'impresa la situazione è oggi molto più propizia di qualche decennio or sono. Gli studi si sono moltiplicati e come vedremo continuano a farlo: sulle nuove basi allargate, il bilancio appare più sicuro e agevole.

Ma trovare un percorso di senso nel vasto mare dell'antropologia moderna richiede pur sempre qualche decisione preliminare. Anzitutto, occorre chiarire quali ne furono le direttrici problematiche principali. Ritengo che queste possano ridursi, nella sostanza, alle cinque seguenti:

- 1) Il problema genetico: l'origine dell'uomo;
- 2) Il problema metafisico: l'uomo spirituale, dotato di anima, ovvero oggetto di studio naturalistico;
- 3) Il problema biologico: la distinzione dell'uomo dalle altre specie e la sua articolazione interna in razze;
- 4) Il problema etnografico: la diffusione e differenziazione dell'uomo sul pianeta;
- 5) Il problema politico-morale: il carattere, le leggi e i costumi delle diverse popolazioni umane.

Questo elenco, sia chiaro, non aspira a presentarsi come esaustivo o definitivo: si tratta di una proposta di schematizzazione, alla quale faremo riferimento più volte nel prosieguo. Le linee problematiche a ciò sottese non possono chiaramente venir considerate tutte assieme; nemmeno però sono da ritenersi necessariamente e a priori in reciproco

isolamento. Piuttosto, in ognuna delle direttrici indicate si assiste, tra i secoli XVII e XIX, a dei mutamenti di prospettiva di portata notevole che *talvolta* avvengono in reciproca interazione e talaltra no, secondo un complicato reticolo di relazioni. Per questa ragione, quando si tratta di storia dell'antropologia ogni preliminare adesione a schemi storiografici precostituiti è assai rischioso e potenzialmente votato all'insuccesso. Questo vale ad esempio per modelli *aprioristicamente* continuisti ovvero *aprioristicamente* votati all'individuazione di cesure epocali (alla Foucault, per intenderci), i quali sono destinati ad essere irrimediabilmente smentiti dalla complessità dei fattori in gioco.

Naturalmente, a proposito di grandi cesure, sembra e in parte è logico attribuire una quota considerevole delle sopra accennate innovazioni all'impatto culturale dell'espansione geografica degli Stati europei dopo la scoperta del Nuovo Mondo. Questo è senz'altro vero; ma occorre distinguere: si tratta di un fattore fondamentale per alcuni dei settori problematici sopra indicati (4), mentre in altri ambiti (2) ben maggiore impatto ebbe ad esempio, poco più tardi, la Rivoluzione scientifica nel suggerire che si potessero applicare anche allo studio dell'uomo quelle stesse procedure scientifiche che tante nebbie avevano dissipato a vantaggio della conoscenza oggettiva della natura.

Ora, una domanda assai pressante sotto il profilo metodologico è la seguente: è possibile sciogliere o anche tranciare il legame che, nelle pagine dei grandi pensatori europei, si instaura *talora* (come si è detto) tra questi filoni di pensiero (1-5)? La risposta a questo interrogativo va ponderata con attenzione: la prudenza nell'esplorazione di un territorio immenso consiglia infatti di procedere per gradi; ma d'altra parte perdere il senso della totalità, di un movimento di idee che si influenzano e sostengono reciprocamente, è un'insidia altrettanto consistente.

Quello che la complessità del problema antropologico, la sua multi-dimensionalità, suggerisce in ogni caso, è la più completa diffidenza rispetto a certe facili semplificazioni. Pensiamo a quanti si cavano d'impaccio rifugiandosi nella comoda categoria della scoperta dell'Altro – paludato, per l'occasione, col caratteristico costumino da selvaggio americano – nel quale si anniderebbe il motore propulsivo e il significato profondo della Rivoluzione antropologica che stiamo esaminando (ma su questo cfr. *infra*, § 4).

2. QUARANTE ANS APRÈS

Uno degli spunti all'origine della presente riflessione è offerto, come si è detto, dalla riedizione di un lavoro classico di Sergio Landucci dal titolo *I filosofi e i selvaggi*. Riedizione preziosa per due ragioni: intanto per il valore intrinseco della ricerca di Landucci; ma poi, a mo' di valore aggiunto, per la circostanza che la nuova edizione ha imposto e consentito all'autore un lucido sguardo retrospettivo sulla precedente edizione e su alcuni presupposti metodologici – ma anche politici – non solo dell'oggetto della ricerca ovvero *dell'antropologia*, che già ne pone in copia, ma anche e ancor più *della storia* dell'antropologia. Iniziamo da qualche dato sul lavoro di Landucci, uscito in prima edizione per Laterza nel 1972, e poi per Einaudi nel 2014¹. Fin dalla prima edizione, per chi aveva avuto modo di apprezzarlo, il lavoro si era imposto come uno dei punti di riferimento per gli studi italiani nel settore. Sicché lo si è inizialmente visto ricomparire in libreria non senza una certa vaga inquietudine, dovuta al momentaneo timore che potesse trattarsi di un'operazione editorialistica di mera reimmissione nel mercato di un lavoro su un tema di straordinaria importanza e di perenne attualità, ma che sarebbe risultato irrimediabilmente datato se fosse stato riproposto senza variazioni significative. Invece, per il sollievo e la gioia dell'appassionato di questi temi, il lavoro di riedizione compiuto dall'autore è intelligente e intellettualmente coraggioso: si tratta della rivisitazione e in ultima analisi della ri-vivificazione di un materiale di eccellenza, ma d'annata, mediante un lavoro approfondito di autentico ripensamento. Ancora un cenno formale prima di entrare nel merito: rispetto alla precedente, l'edizione 2014 è aumentata, oltre che di una *Prefazione*, di un capitolo di "storia semantica" (definizione dello stesso Landucci) su *Barbarie e civiltà*², nonché di molti aggiornamenti bibliografici su quanto aggiuntosi nei circa quarant'anni trascorsi dalla precedente edizione; mentre una parte del già cospicuo apparato delle

¹ S. Landucci, *I filosofi e i selvaggi*, Torino, Einaudi, 2014; Id., *I filosofi e i selvaggi 1580-1780*, Bari, Laterza, 1972.

² Landucci, *I filosofi e i selvaggi* 2014, p. 21-57.

note a piè di pagina è slittata in una sorta di appendice, dal titolo *Note complementari*³.

Siamo dunque davanti a un esperimento raro, vuoi perché non sempre è dato tornare su quanto si è scritto così tanto tempo addietro, vuoi perché è comunque difficile farlo. Così, è d'obbligo partire da quanto Landucci affida alla breve ma densa *Premessa*, a partire dalle origini del suo primigenio interesse per il tema: la disamina della tesi che il celebre mito del “buon selvaggio” avesse una funzione politica reazionaria, in quanto tendente a sublimare le condizioni socio-economiche dei contadini europei⁴. Tesi che poi si mostrò inconsistente, con conseguenze di grande momento. E' infatti inevitabile, e Landucci non vi si sottrae, il confronto con l'altra grande opera che, assieme a *I filosofi e i selvaggi* ha segnato gli studi italiani degli anni Settanta e Ottanta (almeno) in materia: *Adamo e il nuovo mondo* di Giuliano Gliozzi, uscito qualche anno più tardi, nel 1978⁵. Ed è proprio a proposito del raffronto tra i due testi che Landucci introduce osservazioni metodologiche di estremo interesse. Racconta Landucci che il suo intento originario era stato quello di fare una «storia delle ideologie, nell'accezione marxiana»: che «se mai ce l'avessi fatta» avrebbe potuto somigliare proprio all'*Adamo* che scrisse poi Gliozzi. La constatazione dell'inconsistenza dell'ipotesi di partenza, sopra accennata (il buon selvaggio e il contadino europeo), fece sì che le cose andassero del tutto altrimenti, anzi proprio a rovescio: [c]osì, di Gliozzi sarei stato la testa di turco: lo storico delle idee – anziché, come lui, delle ideologie – con cui se la prendeva nell'Introduzione [...] ero infatti io, per i miei *Selvaggi*»⁶. Gli anni successivi videro un riavvicinamento delle posizioni tra i due studiosi, che Landucci attribuisce all'onestà intellettuale «al di sopra di qualsiasi apprezzamento» di Gliozzi, il quale intraprendeva un

³ Landucci, *I filosofi e i selvaggi* 2014, p. 357-403.

⁴ Landucci, *I filosofi e i selvaggi* 2014, p. xii. Scriveva Landucci nella prima edizione: “[s]oprattutto, questo: non è, il presente, un libro sul cosiddetto mito del buon selvaggio”, e aggiungeva qualcosa che oggi non vale più: “[d]a più parti si sente dire urgente, oggi, il bisogno di nuovi studi su un tale argomento”. Landucci, *I filosofi e i selvaggi* 1972, p. 13.

⁵ G. Gliozzi, *Adamo e il nuovo mondo. La nascita dell'antropologia come ideologia coloniale: dalle genealogie bibliche alle teorie razziali (1500-1700)*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1976.

⁶ Landucci, *I filosofi e i selvaggi* 2014, p. xii.

percorso di revisione (e in parte di autocritica) interrotto solo dalla sua prematura scomparsa nel 1991. L'interessantissima retrospettiva offerta dalla *Prefazione* di Landucci discute poi – a partire da una stroncatura di Furio Diaz del 1974⁷ – la relazione del lavoro del 1972 con il marxismo e lo strutturalismo. Rispetto al marxismo, spiega Landucci, l'atteggiamento del volume era circostanziato (“già allora avrei detto: mezzo e mezzo”) per via di una ritrosia dell'autore verso l'esaltazione marxiana dello sviluppo produttivo, esaltazione reputata non lontana dalla mentalità borghese; mentre il termine di riferimento era piuttosto lo Engels de *L'origine della famiglia, della proprietà privata e dello Stato*. Lo spaccato culturale offerto da Landucci è netto allorché afferma di non avere allora esplicitato questa posizione (“senz'altro per perbenismo”, afferma con indiscutibile onestà intellettuale) affidandone invece il messaggio a un cenno sui costi della civilizzazione di cui nel capitolo engelsiano su *La gens irochese*⁸. Con molto realismo, il Landucci del 2014 spiega di avere tolto questi riferimenti “perché suppongo che, ahimè, non verrebbero neanche intesi”⁹. Quanto allo strutturalismo, poi, esso era senza dubbio assente dal libro. In particolare, Landucci non indulge mai ai bruschi strappi del “discontinuismo” strutturalista, non tanto per adesione preconcepita alla dottrina opposta, quanto perché il suo studio delle fonti è troppo approfondito per lasciar spazio a fantasiose alternanze tra “epoche” in cui tutti assieme cambierebbero casacca. Lo strutturalismo, chiarisce Landucci, non c'era nel suo libro del 1972 se non nel senso generalissimo (e in fondo evanescente) di un'opposizione allo storicismo italiano, come forse lo intendeva Diaz nella recensione. Autori come Diaz o Venturi, sintetizza Landucci, “non erano soltanto storici dell'illuminismo, erano anche illuministi, o neo-illuministi, loro stessi; e io, invece, no”¹⁰.

Ho fin qui insistito, seguendo il testo, sul contesto metodologico ma anche socio-politico del lavoro del 1972 – questione che a fronte del monumentale lavoro sulle fonti svolto da Landucci potrebbe apparire, se non marginale, almeno secondaria – perché ritengo tali considerazioni

⁷ Cfr. F. Diaz, *I filosofi e i selvaggi*, Rivista storica italiana, 86 (1974), pp. 557-568.

⁸ Landucci, *I filosofi e i selvaggi* 1972, p. 9.

⁹ Landucci, *I filosofi e i selvaggi* 2014, p. xiii.

¹⁰ Landucci, *I filosofi e i selvaggi* 2014, p. xiv.

estremamente interessanti anche al giorno d'oggi, e perché intendo concludere (cfr. *infra*, § 4) con una riflessione su quello odierno, di contesto, in ordine al problema della metodologia nella storia dell'antropologia. Un settore della storiografia, questo, che sembra più esposto di altri all'interazione – quando non al cortocircuito – tra le *proprie* premesse metodologiche e quelle attribuite all'oggetto dello studio, come mostra fin troppo bene il caso dell'illuminismo illuminato degli illuministi, citato alla fine del paragrafo precedente. Gli spunti offerti da Landucci nella *Prefazione* del 2014, come si è visto, non sono pochi né banali: storia *delle idee* o storia *delle ideologie*? – quest'ultima, ispirata allo strutturalismo (oggi meno probabilmente al marxismo)? E trasversalmente a tutto ciò, quella storia *della filosofia* che incontra, secondo modalità tutte da chiarire, l'insieme di questi orientamenti e discipline.

3. I FILOSOFI E I SELVAGGI

Rimandando la discussione metodologica al paragrafo conclusivo, sarà utile fare il punto su alcuni dei risultati del lavoro di Landucci. Anzitutto, tornando alla partizione quinaria sopra introdotta (cfr. *supra*, § 1), va detto che Landucci concentra la propria attenzione fortemente, se non esclusivamente, sull'ambito (5), quello della dottrina politico-morale. Stante quanto sopra si è detto, è chiaro che questa precisazione non toglie nulla al lavoro. Anzi, vi è un'indubbia coerenza nella scelta, in parte esplicitata nell'Introduzione del libro, il cui *incipit* dichiara perentoriamente bandite le questioni teologiche (1), le discussioni su modalità e tempi del popolamento del Nuovo mondo (4), oltre agli usi meramente esemplaristici della figura del selvaggio¹¹. Non moltissimo, in verità, il libro contiene su quelli che nello schema sopra proposto sono i due ambiti rimanenti: se quello metafisico (2) è oggettivamente meno rilevante, data la scelta tematica specifica, forse ci si poteva aspettare

¹¹ Landucci, *I filosofi e i selvaggi* 2014, p. 3.

qualcosa di più su quello biologico-razziale (3); ma di questo si dirà più avanti¹².

Landucci articola i risultati della sua ricerca su fonti primarie e secondarie, impressionante per quantità e qualità, entro sei capitoli, dedicati rispettivamente a: L'esperienza della diversità; La società e lo Stato; La questione della religione; L'opera del tempo; La natura e la cultura; Le maniere di vivere. Sarebbe impossibile qui ripercorrere i risultati principali che l'autore regala al lettore capace di seguirlo per le quasi 400 pagine del volume – conteggiate senza gli apparati, costituiti dall'ampia bibliografia, aggiornata al 2014, che se può esser detta esaustiva (cosa semplicemente impossibile) è comunque ragionevolmente ricca, e da un indice dei nomi che da solo, nelle sue 15 pagine fitte di nomi scritti a corpo assai piccolo su due colonne, dà un'idea dell'ampiezza e della serietà del lavoro. In particolare, Landucci ha il merito di avere esplorato non solo le tesi dei filosofi sui selvaggi, ma in moltissimi casi anche le fonti di queste loro tesi, fonti spesso tutt'altro che filosofiche e appartenenti anzi ai generi letterari più diversi, a partire naturalmente dai resoconti di viaggio, ma non solo. Questo consente al lettore di assaporare il formarsi di giudizi e pregiudizi in un gioco di reciproci incastri, non di rado avvincente: ora fatto di mutamenti più rapidi, ora di lente sedimentazioni dell'opinione. In certo modo, dalla vertigine che ne consegue emergono alcuni centri gravitazionali: Hobbes, Locke e Hume; Montaigne, Montesquieu e naturalmente Rousseau; Leibniz, Herder e un po' anche Kant; senza dimenticare il nostro Vico. In certo modo, il libro è una ricerca appassionata e quasi *maniacale* – sia detto nel senso del *Fedro* platonico – di quanto sta a monte e a valle delle affermazioni sui selvaggi di questi autori (ed altri), dove la risalita e la discesa di questi pendii sono compiute senza risparmio alcuno di fiato, nei limiti cronologici e tematici posti alla ricerca. Ma dir questo è ancora poco, perché mentre si compie questa operazione *I filosofi e i selvaggi* non si esime dal confronto con la letteratura critica, non solo sui massimi sistemi ma anche su questioni specifiche che altrove (specie fuori dall'Italia) meno facilmente sarebbero affidate a un volume e per lo più, invece, a saggi specialistici.

¹² Cfr. *infra*, nel presente § 3

Si sarà capito, quindi, e non c'è motivo di nascondere, che i grandi pregi del libro sono a un tempo i suoi ben minori difetti. Il lettore che utilizzasse il testo come primo avvicinamento alla problematica potrebbe vacillare dinanzi alla moltitudine di riferimenti i quali peraltro, come si è detto, non sono tutti di eguale valore e significato. Non che questi non siano funzionali alle tesi di volta in volta sostenute da Landucci, ma forse la forma letteraria della monografia avrebbe preteso anche meno, senza andare a detrimento del rigore scientifico (ché molti dettagli si possono sempre delegare a pubblicazioni-satellite) ma aiutando un poco la leggibilità. Vale la pena di chiarire meglio questo appunto, a scanso di possibili equivocazioni: ne *I filosofi e i selvaggi* non vi sono sfoggi di eruzione, né riempimenti esornativi dettati da *horror vacui*. Il problema è invece quanto il lettore medio – e mi verrebbe da precisare: quello del 2014 ancor più di quello del 1972 – sia preparato a una pietanza tanto sostanziosa. Ed è un problema del quale Landucci è consapevole, al punto da chiarire in questa nuova edizione che il lavoro di revisione ha tenuto presente, tra le altre cose, anche questo aspetto, con la traduzione in italiano dei passi lasciati in latino o francese nel 1972 e con altri dispositivi (alleggerimento delle note) volti a facilitare la comunicazione del contenuto del lavoro¹³. Non una retromarcia ma un passo avanti; forse tuttavia ancora insufficiente per venire incontro agli standard che oggi vanno sempre più diffondendosi. Se poi questo diffondersi sia un bene o un male, non è cosa che si vuole o può discutere nel presente lavoro.

Non voglio però esimermi dal rilevare quello che, invece, ritengo essere un punto su cui il lavoro di Landucci si presta a una critica. Riprendendo un cenno già introdotto sopra, penso al ruolo giocato nell'equilibrio complessivo dalle *teorie scientifiche* sull'uomo sviluppate nel periodo preso in esame. Nella griglia proposta in apertura, questi temi sono rubricati sotto le dizioni: (1) Il problema genetico: l'origine dell'uomo e (3) Il problema biologico: la distinzione dell'uomo dalle altre specie e la sua articolazione interna in razze. Ora, a mio parere la relazione tra questi momenti teorici e quello che mi sembra sia stato messo al centro da Landucci (5: Il problema politico-morale: il carattere,

¹³ Landucci, *I filosofi e i selvaggi* 2014 p. xiv. Quanto alla mancata traduzione delle fonti nelle «lingue di Leibniz» già nel 1972 Landucci inseriva un'annotazione dal vago sapore giustificatorio (p. 22).

le leggi e i costumi delle diverse popolazioni umane) è più complessa, e al tempo stesso più stretta, di quanto il lettore de *I filosofi e i selvaggi* non possa essere condotto a ritenere. Tralasciando l'assenza comprensibile di un Tyson¹⁴ o un Petrus Camper, persino Linneo e Blumenbach (a voler ritenere Sömmerring e Cuvier nati troppo tardi per il dibattito in questione) sono citati in modo fugace¹⁵. Più presente è Buffon, ma in generale non per gli aspetti più legati alla sua teoria della degenerazione razziale, alla quale aderì anche uno Herder¹⁶. Persino quando si arriva a Meiners¹⁷ il problema della teoria razziale rimane ampiamente in secondo piano. Ora, pur comprendendo le scelte di campo di Landucci, esplicitate con chiarezza, e pur essendo convinto (come già detto) che sia non solo impossibile, ma anche inutile e talora persino fuorviante pensare di trattare *tutti assieme* i diversi temi antropologici (all'ingrosso: le 5 famiglie problematiche distinte *supra* nel § 1): ciò nondimeno, va detto che la considerazione che i filosofi ebbero dei selvaggi americani in non pochi casi fu mediata e filtrata da schemi di tipo biologico e razziale, riguardanti sia la suddivisione e articolazione interna alla specie umana, sia la questione a ciò strettamente connessa dell'origine di tali selvaggi. E' bensì vero che le prime ricerche di anatomia comparata (Tyson), o di craniologia su basi estetico-pittoriche (Camper) e poi craniometria comparata (Sömmerring, Blumenbach) erano indirizzate alla determinazione delle differenze tra gli europei e i negri d'Africa (prima che il termine assumesse connotazione spregiativa), mentre oggetto della ricerca di Landucci è il selvaggio *americano*, la cui immagine in Europa ebbe senza dubbio una sua propria specificità. E tuttavia, non ci volle poi troppo perché le considerazioni biologiche di cui sopra iniziassero a confluire in una *sistematica* delle "razze umane" nelle quali il ruolo degli amerindi

¹⁴ Indicativo della tesi e affascinante nella sua fenomenologia già il titolo dell'opera più nota dell'anatomista inglese: E. Tyson, *Orang-Outang, sive Homo Sylvestris, or the Anatomy of a Pygmie. Compared with that of a Monkey, an Ape, and a Man. To which is added a Philological Essay Concerning the Pygmies, the Cynocephali, the Satyrs, and Sphinges of the Ancients. Wherein it will appear that they are all either Apes or Monkeys, and not Men, as formerly pretended*, London, Bennet; facsimile ed., con una Introduction di A. Montagu (pp. 1-12), London, Pall Mall, 1966.

¹⁵ Landucci, *I filosofi e i selvaggi* 2014 p. 293 (Linneo), 264 (Blumenbach).

¹⁶ Per es. Landucci, *I filosofi e i selvaggi* 2014 p. 308 ss.

¹⁷ Landucci, *I filosofi e i selvaggi* 2014 p. 334.

veniva ad assumere una fisionomia diversa a seconda che il contesto scientifico complessivo prevedesse di considerare la stirpe umana come unica, oppure di catalogarla in tre, o in cinque razze, e che prevedesse di spiegarne la presenza in senso poligenista oppure secondo la cosiddetta teoria della de-generazione, ma intesa *alla lettera* (*Ent-artung*) come differenziazione all'interno di un *genus*. Certo, si tratta di un'altra storia: ma data la sopra ricordata abbondanza di riferimenti a temi ed autori spesso trascurabili, citati solamente (e a buon diritto, s'intende) quali fonti, forse qualche parola in più sul contesto scientifico, condiviso o meno dai filosofi di volta in volta trattati, avrebbe potuto giovare al lavoro. Un esempio: il consapevolmente bistrattato Voltaire ebbe senza dubbio gli atteggiamenti verso i selvaggi ben riassunti da Landucci in varie pagine¹⁸. Ma se Voltaire indulgeva a quegli aspri giudizi che lo hanno giustamente reso il campione dell'anti-rousseauismo nel contesto della mitologia buon selvaggista, è perché il quadro voltairiano è sostanzialmente quello di un poligenismo radicale e rigoroso, nel quale non c'è posto per alcuna forma di unità del genere umano. Tant'è vero che le Voltaire non la pensa diversamente sugli americani e sugli ottentotti, e ritaglia piuttosto la sua filosofia della storia su quella che gli pare l'élite socioculturale dell'umanità: l'Europeo istruito. Sia chiaro che Landucci dà conto al lettore dell'adesione di Voltaire al poligenismo e delle sue tesi razziali¹⁹. Ma allora perché non dare spazio maggiore a un tema che, più in generale, potrebbe avere avuto (e a mio giudizio ebbe davvero) ben altro impatto sulla questione, anche presso altri autori?

4. DEL METODO

¹⁸ Scrive Landucci in sede di *Premessa* che Voltaire nel libro «compare sempre in prospettive che non sono mai quelle nelle quali si delinea la sua grandezza»: *I filosofi e i selvaggi*, 1972, p. 17; l'osservazione è omessa dall'edizione 2014, in quanto metteva capo a una questione di metodo allorché Landucci dichiarava la sua distanza dall'«adornhorkeimerismo» (sic.) sostanzinandola col riferimento a Engels: tutte cose, come si è detto sopra, oggi praticamente incomprensibili a una parte del pubblico.

¹⁹ La nuova redazione 2014 della pagina in questione mostra (ci sembra) la volontà di sottolineare maggiormente questo aspetto. Si confronti Landucci, *I filosofi e i selvaggi* 1972, pp. 78-82, e Id., *I filosofi e i selvaggi* 2014, 97-98.

Alla domanda sulla riuscita dell'operazione di rivisitazione del testo di Landucci del 1972 nella nuova edizione 2014 si deve dunque rispondere senza riserve in modo affermativo. E proprio oggi questa operazione pone un interessante interrogativo metodologico. Quale metodologia può e deve adottare la storia dell'antropologia – lo studio dello studio dell'uomo? A rigore, si potrebbe obiettare che il libro di Landucci non è una storia dell'antropologia, il che è senz'altro vero. Ma la questione trascende ora il lavoro di Landucci per tornare alle questioni di metodo. Lo si voglia o meno, del resto, *I filosofi e i selvaggi* è un documento *di e per* una storia dell'antropologia, ne illumina una parte importante e in questo risiede una porzione non secondaria del suo notevole valore.

Come scrivere dunque questa storia? Anzitutto, a integrazione di quanto sopra detto sulla falsariga della prefazione a *I filosofi e i selvaggi* del 2014, va detto che Landucci nel 1972 esordiva proprio *negando* che la sua fosse una ricerca di storia delle idee²⁰. E nel tentativo di chiarire meglio, spiegava che il proprio il titolo «*I filosofi e selvaggi*» (corsivo originale) indicava la strada seguita: «quant'altro vi si trovi eventualmente richiamato, dalla letteratura etnografica dell'epoca, viene richiamato in funzione di una qualche comprensione delle prospettive interpretative sui 'selvaggi' presenti nelle opere di quelli, i filosofi»²¹. E' difficile non leggere queste parole come un richiamo al nucleo centrale del lavoro dello storico della filosofia rispetto a quello ben distinto – e senza alcun intento derogatorio – dello storico delle idee. Eppure, Landucci ha cura di distanziarsi di un passo anche dal profilo di storico della filosofia, definizione cui preferisce quella di «studioso di storia della filosofia».

Partito a suo tempo, come narra nel 2014, con l'intenzione di fare lo storico delle ideologie, Landucci si ritrova dunque nei panni dello «studioso» di storia della filosofia. Ma con quali ragioni dunque, come si è detto sopra, Gliozzi avrebbe individuato in Landucci lo *storico delle idee* da mettere alla gogna nel suo *Adamo e il nuovo mondo*? Vale la pena di seguire questo dibattito un po' più da vicino. Gliozzi, in effetti,

²⁰ Landucci, *I filosofi e i selvaggi* 1972, p. 7.

²¹ Landucci, *I filosofi e i selvaggi* 1972, p. 8.

aveva un obiettivo abbastanza preciso nell'Introduzione ad *Adamo e il nuovo mondo*: seppellire non tanto il defunto mito del buon selvaggio, quanto, quanto pure *il mito del mito* del buon selvaggio. Gliozzi ne certifica non la dipartita ma l'irrelevanza sull'orizzonte delle ricerche di storia dell'antropologia, le quali non soltanto ne sono immuni, ma sono infine dispensate anche dal doversene dichiarare immuni. Per Gliozzi la correlazione tra le ricerche di Chinard e Atkinson sul selvaggio, *bon* (fr.) o *noble* (ingl.) che fosse, e la *history of ideas* delle origini erano un fatto palese. Ora, è chiaro che Gliozzi non imputava affatto a Landucci una semplicistica adesione alla storia delle idee "classica" intesa in tal senso: al contrario, gli riconosceva il merito di avere intrapreso «con scrupolo e acume» la fatica di «approfondire e allargare l'analisi dei testi cinque-seicenteschi, in modo da ricavare da essi – piuttosto che da categorie storiografiche precostituite – l'indicazione dei problemi concettuali che la scoperta del Nuovo Mondo aveva fatalmente indotto nell'ambito della cultura europea»²². *I filosofi e i selvaggi* è dunque tra i lavori che hanno contribuito a svellere non solo il mito del buon selvaggio, ma anche gli equivoci ad esso successivi. Analogo, del resto, il giudizio espresso da Gliozzi in una recensione apparsa su un quotidiano del tempo. Scrive Gliozzi che in relazione alle carenze della vecchia scuola dei Chinard ed Atkinson «gli studiosi di antropologia hanno di recente manifestato la tendenza a individuare in scrittori cinque-settecenteschi i "precursori" del metodo comparativo, del relativismo culturale e persino dello strutturalismo, con grave pregiudizio, com'è ovvio, di ogni prospettiva e credibilità storica. Merito dell'ampio studio di Sergio Landucci è ora quello di avere affrontato l'argomento senza alcuna concessione a queste facili quanto inconcludenti estrapolazioni [...]»²³

Senonché, e con ciò siamo al punto critico, l'impostazione di Landucci appariva a Gliozzi insufficiente a chiarire «il *perché*» delle trasformazioni in atto, domanda lasciata inevasa dalle «risibili risposte degli storici del buon selvaggio». E Gliozzi lo individuava, al di fuori dai miti e dagli archetipi ancestrali del rapporto con l'Altro, nelle "relazioni

²² Gliozzi, *Adamo e il nuovo mondo*, p. 4.

²³ G. Gliozzi, *I filosofi e i selvaggi*, "Paese Sera", Supplemento libri, 15.9.1972 [Recensione di Sergio Landucci, *I filosofi e i selvaggi 1580-1780*, Bari, Laterza, 1972, pp. 502], poi in G. Gliozzi, *Differenze e uguaglianza nella cultura europea*, a cura di A. Strumia, introd. di C.A. Viano, Napoli, Vivarium, 1993, 532-534 (p. 532).

materiali” che gli Europei venivano stabilendo con i selvaggi “reali”: non *miti* ma relazioni oggettive, economiche e di potere. Come si è detto, Gliozzi sarebbe andato modificando questo approccio. Del suo progressivo arricchimento rendono ottima testimonianza i suoi saggi, opportunamente raccolti in volume due anni dopo la sua scomparsa.²⁴ Non è questa la sede per descrivere anche sommariamente questo itinerario, nel quale la critica dell’ideologia coloniale finì col rivelarsi una struttura troppo rigida per descrivere il vasto movimento di idee svelato e progressivamente acquisito dalla ricerca.

Certo si dovrebbe aggiungere che nel frattempo il referente polemico (per così dire, l’avversario comune ai due grandi studiosi italiani) andava mutando il proprio genoma fino a manifestarsi nell’apriorismo struttural-semiologico alla Todorov, che articolava il suo lavoro sulla *Conquista dell’America* nelle quattro categorie (*scoprire, conquistare, amare, conoscere*), che egli suppone esaurire «l’inevitabile spazio del rapporto con l’altro»²⁵. La lezione di Gliozzi di fronte a questa *nouvelle vague* di «imposizione al materiale storico di arbitrarie categorie psicologistiche» è esemplare, quando scrive che queste semplificazioni conducono a svilire il «fascino dell’alterità storica» e aggiunge: «La storiografia naviga, e deve navigare, in mari ignoti. In ciò sta il gusto della ricerca, che nessuna tranquilla crociera su rotte già battute può,

²⁴ G. Gliozzi, *Differenze e uguaglianza nella cultura europea*, passim.

²⁵ T. Todorov, *La conquête de l’Amérique. La question de l’autre*, Paris, Seuil, 1982, trad. it. *La conquista dell’America. Il problema dell’«altro»*, Torino, Einaudi, 1984, p. 117. Per una disamina degli errori grossolani di Todorov si veda la magistrale e divertente recensione di G. Gliozzi, *L’incomprensione del diverso* [Recensione di Tz. Todorov, *La conquista dell’America. Il problema dell’altro*], in *L’indice dei libri del mese*, 1/3, 1984; poi in *Differenze e uguaglianza nella cultura europea*, pp. 549-553, in part. a p. 552, dove commentando il Las Casas del quarto capitolo del volume recensito, esempio usato da Todorov della categoria del comprendere, si legge che Todorov presenta «un Las Casas trasformato, successivo al 1550, “dopo il suo definitivo ritorno in Messico” (p. 226). Purtroppo non risulta che dopo quella data il vecchio prelado abbia più posto piede fuori di Spagna; né è chiaro quale opera letteraria possa considerarsi espressione di questa nuova, supposta fase del pensiero lascasiano, dato che l’*Apologética Historia* [...] era stata annoverata nel capitolo precedente [...]. Ma tutto ciò poco importa. Lo schema semiologico di Todorov non si lascia sbaragliare da queste minuzie da erudito [...]».

con la sua pace, sostituire»²⁶. E proseguendo nell'immagine Gliozzi paragonava la metodologia della ricerca alla strumentazione di bordo: un presidio di sicurezza soggetto a continui miglioramenti e che mai tuttavia può dare garanzie assolute, senza tuttavia che ciò rappresenti una buona ragione per gettare a mare la bussola e gli altri strumenti per «abbandonarsi alle promesse di certezza delle allettanti sirene che infestano questi mari».

Dal complesso di queste suggestioni vengono richiami metodologici che non sono affatto superati. La storiografia filosofica si avvale di metodologie che si arricchiscono continuamente per opera di discipline ausiliarie (in senso contingente, ché di per sé esse sono ovviamente dotate di altrettanto valore assoluto) o di indirizzi metodologici, nella scelta dei quali non si può lasciarsi guidare da decisioni a priori, ma si deve seguire l'oggetto specifico della ricerca. La storia delle idee non può portare a una fluidificazione del discorso filosofico che si spinga al punto di disconoscere la specificità. Altro è il valore *testimoniale* dell'epifania del selvaggio nel testo filosofico inteso quale "campione" di quale fosse l'immagine, del selvaggio, presso la cultura del tempo; altro lo specifico argomentativo che la filosofia è obbligata a praticare e il suo storico a registrare. Non che il testo filosofico non possa *anche* fungere da specimen in questo senso: ma allora cambia completamente di valore. Ha ragione Landucci a rivendicare con il sottile ma perentorio mezzo della sottolineatura il ruolo di protagonista del suo libro *ai filosofi*, non ai selvaggi.

A titolo di conclusione, vorrei esprimere il rammarico che ricerche di questo valore possano correre il rischio di rimanere entro i confini nazionali, per ragioni legate non già al loro valore intrinseco – ché sono invece migliori di tanti paludati testi apparsi nel ben più vasto mercato anglofono. Landucci si rammarica del fatto che gli studiosi devoti al tema abbiano proceduto separati, spesso ignorando l'uno i lavori dell'altro²⁷. Vero. Ma quante speranze hanno i nuovi *Filosofi e i selvaggi* di incidere sul dibattito internazionale? Oltre alla propria lingua madre (e senza contare il Greco), Landucci ha diligentemente indagato

²⁶ G. Gliozzi, *Filosofia e antropologia nell'epoca moderna: un recente interesse storiografico*, in "Rivista di Filosofia", 77/2, pp. 293-307; poi in *Differenze e uguaglianza nella cultura europea*, pp. 106-119 (119).

²⁷ Landucci, *I filosofi e i selvaggi*, 2014, p. XIII.

letteratura primaria e secondaria in latino, francese, inglese, tedesco, molta della quale rara o sconosciuta, non di rado di difficile accessibilità. Ma gli autori anglosassoni o francesi prenderanno a loro volta in considerazione un lavoro eccellente, un'autentica miniera d'oro come *I filosofi e i selvaggi*, scritto in lingua italiana? Purtroppo, ne dubito; ma aggiungo subito l'auspicio sincero che questo mio dubbio possa rivelarsi ingeneroso e miope. Certo, non sarebbe fuori luogo una possibile traduzione in lingua inglese: la quale, piaccia o non piaccia, è veicolo di diffusione delle idee del quale non si può fare a meno.

THE PARTICULARIST METHOD OF ETHICAL REASONING

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ABSTRACT

This essay concerns itself with the methodology of practical ethics. There is a variety of methods employed in ethics. Moral particularism challenges the widely held view that the application of principles is the best approach to practical ethics. Particularists deny an essential link between morality and principles and they hold that ethical decisions should be made case by case and not by applying principles. In this article, I show how ethical reasoning can avoid subsuming cases under principles. To accomplish this, I clarify (in Section 1) the basic features of particularism and outline how ethicists should approach ethical issues, on the particularists' view. Section 2 explains the crucial notion of a practical reason by focussing on simple reasons for action, and I explain the epistemic problems that particularism faces. In the third section, I demonstrate then how we can construct complex reasons from simpler reasons in a logically correct way. This section shows that particularism can be reconstructed as a logically correct method of ethical reasoning. The result of this study is that despite its shortcomings, particularist reasoning is a useful and legitimate method of practical ethics.

KEYWORDS

Particularism, practical reasons, moral principles, holism, ethical reasoning, methods of practical ethics.

This is an essay on the methodology of practical ethics. Over the years, various conflicting views about how best to do practical ethics have been proposed, but no approach has firmly established itself as dominant. One commonly used method to arrive at justified ethical decisions consists in the application of principles. However, in the face of continuing disagreement about which principles are correct, ethical particularism (hereafter 'particularism' for short) has been presented as an alternative to the principle-based method of ethics. Particularists deny an essential link between ethics and principles and they see little role for moral principles. Their negative attitude

towards principles is based on the view that reasons are context-dependent. Since moral reasons can vary according to context, ethical decisions should be made case by case and not by applying general principles.

There has been a considerable recent debate on one or another version of particularism.¹ The issues that have been discussed in the philosophical literature are mainly *metaphysical* (concerning, e.g., the source of moral truths) and *epistemic* (dealing, e.g., with the basis of justified moral decisions). In this paper I have little to add to this debate. In what follows, I shall rather focus on the methodological issue of how particularists can approach an ethical issue and reach a reasoned decision about its resolution. This topic has suffered from comparative neglect despite the fact that it is of crucial importance if particularism is to be a viable method of practical ethics.

To accomplish my aim of showing that morality can get by without subsuming cases under principles, I clarify (in Section 1) the basic features of particularism and outline how, on the particularists' view, ethicists should approach ethical issues. Section 2 explains the crucial notion of a practical reason by focussing on simple reasons for action. In a third section, I demonstrate then how we can construct complex reasons from simpler reasons in a logically correct way. This section shows that particularism can be reconstructed as a logically correct method of ethical reasoning. For simplicity of presentation, I have sought to set out my presentation in a non-technical way. But for the sake of brevity and clarity, some formalization has been unavoidable, most of which has been relegated to the footnotes.

1. GENERAL FEATURES OF PARTICULARISM

Particularism—as the term is used by Jonathan Dancy, its central contemporary figure on whose work I will focus—holds that ethical reasoning does not need ethical principles to determine how to resolve ethical issues (Dancy 2004).² The particularists' claim that we should do ethics without

¹ Particularist thinking in a broad sense, which implies only a critical attitude towards the application of principles in ethical reasoning and an emphasis on a detailed consideration of the facts of a particular case, has won many adherents in recent years. But particularism properly speaking, as it can be found in the works of Jonathan Dancy, is a hotly contested doctrine. It has many supporters (e.g., Little 2000 and Salay 2008), but it has also attracted considerable criticism (e.g., from Hooker 2000; 2008, Raz 2000 and Väyrynen 2006; 2008). Two collections that introduce into the debate about particularism are Hooker and Little (2000) and Lance et al. (2008).

² Particularism is not a single doctrine but a family of doctrines. What unites particularists is their claim that ethical reasoning should not be based on general principles. This rejection of principles can, however, vary. Strong (or extreme) particularism is the view that there are no

principles is based on the view that moral reasons are sensitive to contexts. This claim of context-sensitivity ('holism', in the philosophical jargon), is the core of the particularist doctrine and is discussed next.

1.1 Holism

Ethical particularism depends on the doctrine of holism about reasons, which has been defined as the view that "a feature that is a reason in one case may be no reason at all, or an opposite reason, in another" (Dancy 2004, 7). On the particularists' view, whether a feature of an action (e.g., that it is a lie) is a reason for this action, or a reason against it, or no reason at all, depends on the circumstances. We cannot know in advance in which way a particular factor will contribute in a given case. In some contexts it may favour an action but in another situation it may be a reason against this action. Particularists insist that this variability of reasons is essential to practical reasoning.

Dancy and other proponents of particularism try to make holism plausible by examples that are intended to show that reasons are generally context-dependent (i.e., holistic). If it currently seems to you that you see something red, this is normally a reason for believing that there is something red before you. But if you know that you have taken a drug that makes blue things look red you do not have any longer a reason for believing that there is something red before you (Dancy 2004, 74). This example suggests that *theoretical* reasons function holistically. But *practical* reasons seem also to be context-dependent. That an action is against the law is in many cases a reason not to do it, but if the law is unjust, it may be no reason against it, or even a reason for doing it (Dancy 2013; McNaughton and Rawling 2000). More importantly, ethical reasons seem to be variable, too. That I have borrowed a book from you, would normally give me some reason to return it to you. But if I learn that you have stolen the book from the library, I seem not to have any longer a reason for returning it (Dancy 2004). That an action causes pain to others is in many contexts a moral reason against it, but if this action is a just punishment or part of an experiment where pain is being inflicted with the informed consent of the participants, causing pain is arguably ethically permissible (Shafer-Landau 1997). Examples of this sort can be multiplied at will; and particularists hold that they can support their doctrine of holism.

defensible (substantive) moral principles (Dancy 2004; 2013). Weak (or moderate) particularism, on the other hand, allows some use of principles but holds that ethical reasoning does not require the subsumption of cases under principles. See to this classification also Cullity (2002), Holton (2002) and Sinnott-Armstrong (1999). In this paper, I shall focus on moderate particularism, which is generally regarded as the more plausible view.

There is a lot to be said about the notion of holism, but I shall restrict myself to some points of clarification that are worth mentioning here. Particularists need not hold that *all* moral reasons function holistically. They can admit that there *maybe* reasons that are *not* variable (even though they tend to doubt it). It is therefore not possible to refute particularism by producing a counter-example of an (apparently) invariant reason—for example by holding that the infliction of suffering on others for your own enjoyment is always a reason against this action (Cullity 2002, 182). When particularists claim that moral reasons are *capable* of being altered by changes in the context, they mean that their nature as reasons can change in various ways: They can *cease* to be a reason for an action at all. As the examples above illustrate, the particular circumstances of cases may nullify a reason. But the context may also *reverse* the polarity of a reason. Instead of being a reason in favour of some action, it becomes a reason against it. In analogy with the chemical notion of valence, particularists call this a change of a reason's valence. Even if the valence of a reason does not change in different contexts, particularists think that its *strength* as a reason may vary in these contexts. That an action is just may be a strong reason for doing it in some contexts but only a weak reason in other circumstances.

There is one final point I wish to make to avoid a possible confusion. All forms of alterations of reasons must be distinguished from *overridden* reasons. According to a widely held view, a reason (e.g., for keeping a promise) can be overridden by the conflicting and stronger reason to help someone in need. An overridden reason is, however, not changed in its nature. But particularists assert that a change in the circumstances can alter the nature of a reason. (I shall return to this in the succeeding subsection.)

1.2 Ethics without principles?

What we need to understand now is why particularists hold that the variability of *reasons* supports their view that we should do ethics without *principles*. This requires first to make a brief comment on the relationship between reasons and principles.

On the particularists' view, reasons and principles are linked because moral principles identify reasons. Let us consider the simple principle 'Lying is wrong' to make this clearer. On the particularists' use of 'reason', the fact that an act is a lie is often (but not necessarily always) a reason for holding that it is wrong. That is, the principle identifies a reason (that an act is a lie) and we can therefore say, 'What you did was wrong *because* it was a lie'.

It is worth mentioning that particularists do not reject principles in general. They accept *formal* principles (e.g., the principle of formal justice that equals are to be treated equally), but oppose the use of *substantive* principles such as

‘Promises are to be kept’ (Dancy 1999). To understand this correctly, it is important to notice that there are different interpretations of substantive principles.

On the *absolutist* conception, moral principles are conclusively binding whatever circumstances arise. Absolute principles are universal claims to the effect that all actions of a certain kind have a certain normative status (i.e., are obligatory, permitted or forbidden). That is to say, holding that the principle ‘Don’t break your promises’ is an absolute principle, implies asserting “that each and every action of breaking a promise is a wrong action, whatever else there may be said for it” (Dancy 2013, 2). However, if holism is correct, there are no invariable features. Breaking a promise is sometimes a reason against doing it, but there can be contexts in which it is a reason for doing it. On the particularists’ view, absolutist principles do therefore not exist.

Some authors admit that a principle like ‘Don’t break your promises’ is much too crude for being universally valid. They hold that such principles must be *specified*. Specification attempts to make principles more concrete by adding content. Promises must be kept, except they are given under duress or one has been tricked into making them, and so forth. But according to holism, even the complex feature of being a promise that has neither been given under duress nor under fraudulent conditions, etc. is still variable (i.e., can be a reason for keeping it or against keeping it). Particularists do therefore not accept specified principles either.

Many principles are meant to be *prima facie* principles only. The classic example of such an account is W.D. Ross’s (1930) theory of *prima facie* duties. On this view, ‘Don’t break a promise’ does not determine the normative status of breaking a promise. Such principles are therefore weaker than absolute principles because they can be overridden. Sometimes one can keep one’s promise only by telling a lie. In such a situation, the right thing to do, may, in the circumstances, be to keep the promise (in other circumstances, the account may tell us to tell the truth). However, no matter whether a *prima facie* principle is overridden or not, the fact that an act is the keeping of a promise invariably counts for this act. Particularists must reject such principles because holism does not allow that certain features *invariably* count for or against an act (Dancy 1983; 2004; 2013).

There is a conception of ethical principles, according to which they create only a presumption for or against performing a certain act. Let us therefore call them *presumptive principles*.³ Since presumptive principles do not determine the moral rightness or wrongness of an act, they are different from absolute

³ There is a terminological confusion in the literature. Some use the term ‘presumptive principle’ but others call them (or something very similar) *default principles* (Stangl 2006). I have dubbed them presumptive principles because this term seems to me more appropriate.

principles. On the presumptive view, there is no guarantee that, say, breaking a promise is always wrong. Defenders of this view can admit that it is usually (or normally) wrong. But they insist that whether it is wrong depends on the specific conditions of the situation; and they hold that in some circumstances, the fact that an act is an instance of breaking a promise can make this act right. That is, the fact that a promise has been broken is only presumptive to its moral status (Stangl 2006). Presumptive principles are also different from *prima facie* principles because on this view, a feature of an action need not *invariably* favour or disfavour it. For instance, that a promise has been broken by not returning a book may be a reason against this act in some contexts but not in others.

Presumptive principles can play an important role in ethical reasoning. They can function “as heuristic devices which direct us towards features of a situation that may be morally relevant” (Stangl 2006, 202). In considering an ethical issue, we have to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant features. Ethicists often overlook important factors (e.g., the long term effects of an option), and the heuristic function of principles is to remind us to these factors. Particularists can accept this heuristic use of principles because on the presumptive conception, no claim is made that certain features are invariably relevant.

Let us take stock. Despite holding that we should do ethics without principles, particularists allow a weak use of principles as heuristics. What they reject is the principle-based method of resolving ethical issues—no matter whether the principles are interpreted as absolute, specified or *prima facie*. According to this method, saying ‘that is stealing and therefore you should not do it’, is understood as giving an incomplete argument, which fully specified reads: ‘stealing is wrong, that is stealing and therefore it is wrong’. By combining the principle (stealing is wrong) with the factual premise (that is stealing), the conclusion is drawn that stealing is wrong. We can call such a way of thinking *subsumptive reasoning* because we draw the conclusion by subsuming the act of stealing under a principle that proscribes it.

1.3 The particularist method outlined

On the particularists’ view, ethical decisions must be made case by case. That is, they do not want to find out whether, say, euthanasia in general is morally permissible but whether a particular case of euthanasia is morally appropriate. They attempt to do this by establishing the reasons for and against the available options and evaluating their relative merits with the aim of finding that option which we have most reason to choose (Dancy, 2004).

This method requires, firstly, a detailed description of the case under consideration. Particularists insist that knowledge of the facts is crucial because it provides the basis for the reasons for and against the options available.

Secondly, considering the various reasons involved in a case requires that one can recognize them. As already said, for particularists, reasons are context-sensitive, which implies that a factor that was a reason in another case need not be a reason in the present case. This makes it understandable why *moral discernment* plays a crucial role in this method. Particularists need to rely on the “experienced moral judge” (Dancy 2013, 5) who is able to discern which features favour or disfavour an option in the circumstances. The experienced moral judge needs, however, not only rely on his moral intuition. He can also use other sources of moral knowledge. As I have already mentioned, ethical principles can be used heuristically to avoid overlooking relevant factors. In addition, particularists allow the use of analogous cases. According to Dancy (2013), a particularist “can perfectly well point to how things are in another perhaps simpler case, and suggest that this reveals something about how things are in the present more difficult case” (p. 5). This shows that analogous cases, too, need to be used heuristically and not, as in traditional casuistic reasoning, as paradigm cases which serve as final object of reference to new and unsettled issues. (I will return to this epistemic problem in the next section.)

Thirdly, since the resolution of ethical issues requires considering reasons for and against the options available, an ethicist needs to combine simple reasons to see where the overall balance lies. This combination can, however, not be done by merely adding them up because reasons can interact. That is to say, the “presence of one feature can affect the weight of another” (Dancy 2004, 105). The skill of discernment is therefore also required when ethicists combine the various simple reasons to a more complex reason.

Finally, after collecting the reasons that favour or disfavour the alternatives, the ethicist has to find that option he has most reason to choose because the morally best decision is the one we have most reason to make in the circumstances (Dancy 2004).

The particularist method has been criticized as all too vague and unhelpful (Hooker 2000; 2008). This criticism is partly due to the fact that particularists have never worked out in detail how their method should work in the resolution of real-life ethical issues (their examples are overly simplistic). In the remainder of this essay, I will present a detailed account of ethical reasoning that is compatible with particularism and that is applicable to problems we face in practical ethics.⁴

⁴ It should be noticed that the account I present in this paper can also be employed by the increasing number of ethicists that are not particularists but are sceptical about the subsumptive mode of ethical reasoning (see e.g., Harris 2003; Toulmin 1981).

2. SIMPLE REASONS FOR ACTION

According to particularism, we ought to do what we have most reason to do. We, therefore, need an account of practical reasons that starts with an explanation of simple reasons (also called unidimensional reasons), and we need to understand how these reasons can be combined into complex (multidimensional) reasons. To keep things as simple as possible, I shall here be concerned with reasoning *under certainty* only. Reasoning is said to be under certainty if the reasoner knows, at least for practical purposes, of each of his options what the outcomes of his taking it would be. Certainty is the simplest case of practical reasoning because no probabilities enter.

2.1 Justifying reasons for action

Since the nature of reasons for acting is controversial and the term ‘reason’ is used in a variety of contexts meaning different things, some conceptual clarifications will be in order. Particularism is not a theory about *explanatory* reasons (i.e., reasons that explain why we do something) but of *normative* reasons (i.e., reasons about what we should do). It takes, however, little familiarity with philosophical discussions of the concept of reasons to know that there are competing theories of normative reasons. There is no need to rehearse this discussion here. But it should be noticed that if particularism is to be a useful method of practical ethics, it must be suitable for (prospectively) justifying what we are going to do and for (retrospectively) warranting what we have done. Reasons that can be used for these purposes are commonly called *justifying reasons*, and it is this type of normative reasons that we are concerned with in this paper. Since we give such reasons in pieces of practical reasoning, I will clarify the notion of justifying reasons with the help of a simple example: You argue that you should water the garden because if you don’t, it will not grow.

This reasoning is certainly *incomplete*. Like most informal reasoning, ethical reasoning is commonly elliptical. In everyday ethical conversations, but also when we try to resolve a serious ethical issue, we almost never make a full and complete statement of our argument. We usually state only a part of it, and our choice of which part we state is determined by pragmatic considerations. But when we analyse the notion of a practical reason we need to make explicit the components of complete reasons that can be left implicit in everyday reasoning. The reasoning is incomplete because it states only a *necessary* condition for the garden’s growth (i.e., it will *not* grow if it is *not* watered). But a necessary

condition does not provide a reason for acting.⁵ In our example, it is compatible with the fact that the garden will not grow even though it *is* watered—in which case you have no reason to water it. We must therefore add that the garden *will* grow if it is watered. By adding this *sufficient* condition, we get now two premises: ‘The garden will not grow if it is not watered’ and ‘The garden will grow if it is watered’.

One effect of this improvement is that the reasoning has become *comparative*. We compare now two options with regard to their outcomes. This is important because practical reasoning requires a choice. If we have no choice—when we slip off the ladder or when our body is held immobile—then we do not reason what to do. This may appear so obviously true as to be hardly worth saying, but many authors, including particularists, have overlooked this fact, and they refer therefore to (monadic) facts (e.g., that a promise has been given) when they discuss practical reasons. It can, however, easily be seen that *monadic* valuations are irrelevant for establishing justifying reasons. If the outcomes of an action are good this is not *ipso facto* a reason *for* doing it because one of its alternatives may be better, in which case you have a reason *against* doing that action. And if an action is assigned a negative value this is not always a reason *against* doing it because all its alternatives may be worse, in which case you have a reason *for* doing that action. To construct a practical reason for an action, we need at least two options; and if we have only two options we have to find that action which is better than its alternative. I take the dyadic (or comparative) term ‘*a* is better than *b*’ to mean that the agent assigns more value to *a* than to *b*, which can, in appropriate contexts, also be expressed by saying that the agent *prefers a* to *b*.

As said, particularists claim that it is *facts* that are reasons for acting. To see that facts do *not* provide justifying reasons, let us consider another example. Searle (2001) holds that “for a long time people had a good reason not to smoke cigarettes ... without knowing that they had such a reason” (p. 99). The reason for not smoking was the *fact* that it causes cancer. I do not deny that there is a use of ‘reason’ that allows saying that they had a reason for not smoking, but I wish to emphasize that those people had no *justification* for not smoking. They did not know the dangers of smoking and they had no reason for believing that it is a health hazard. If a person quitted smoking, he could not (retrospectively) justify his action, and a person who did not take up smoking in the first place could not (prospectively) justify his refusal by referring to its health hazards. Justificatory reasons, however, are meant to provide a justification for the

⁵ An example will be helpful to illustrate this. Assume that I want to become the next heavyweight-boxing champion. But this goal does not imply that I have a reason to start training. Because even though training is a necessary condition for achieving my goal, given my physical constitution and age, I will not become the next boxing champion anyway.

actions they are reasons for.⁶ In short, what is needed for justifying reasons is that the reasoner has a justification for the factual premises (in our example, that the garden grows if, and only if, it is watered), and since he needs to compare the options available, he also needs a warrant for his preferences.

Let us summarize the result of this discussion by stating the reasoning in our example in its explicit form:

- (a) If I water the garden it will grow.
- (b) If I do not water the garden it will not grow.
- (c) I prefer the garden to grow.
- (d) Therefore, I should water the garden.

This is a piece of logically correct reasoning. If you have a justification for the premises (a) – (c) then you have a reason for holding that you should water the garden—and derivatively you have a reason for watering it. The valid reasoning transmits the justification from the premises to the conclusion and it is this fact that renders the premises a *reason* for the conclusion. This reason is a so-called *pro tanto* reason. That is, (a) – (c) are a reason for watering the garden only as far as its growth is concerned. There may be other reasons against watering it. *Pro tanto* reasons therefore need not be decisive reasons for a given course of action.

2.2 *The particularist approach to ethical issues*

A fresh scenario will help to clarify how particularists approach an ethical issue. A sex worker requests from Jones, a health-care professional, antiretrovirals to prevent her from contracting HIV, on the basis that she has clients who often refuse to use condoms. She complains of constant anxiety at the prospect of getting AIDS and asks for PrEP to reduce the risk of contracting HIV.⁷

As will be clear by now, the particularist's approach is *piecemeal*. He starts with collecting *pro tanto* reasons for and against the options available. To find such reasons, he can heuristically use principles (e.g., that he should act in the best interest of his clients), compare the case under consideration to analogous cases, and he can rely on his personal experience. One consideration in favour of prescribing ARVs may be that it significantly decreases his client's risk of

⁶ The particularists' conception of reasons, in particular J. Dancy's notion of a practical reason, has also been criticized by Berker (2007), Lance and Little (2008), Moad (2007) and Raz (2000), although partly on different grounds.

⁷ Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is the use of anti-retroviral (ARV) medication *prior* to exposure to HIV to prevent infection. The example has been adapted from Venter et al. (2014), p. 271.

HIV acquisition. Jones' fully spelled-out first simple reasoning can schematically be put as follows:

If I prescribe ARVs the client has a decreased risk of HIV infection.

If I do not prescribe ARVs the client does not have a decreased risk of HIV infection.

It is better that the client's risk of infection is decreased.

Therefore, I should prescribe ARVs.⁸

As I have already indicated in the previous subsection, this piece of reasoning is logically valid. But the premises of valid reasoning provide only a reason for its conclusion if they are justified. We must therefore have a closer look at the *epistemic* question how Jones can justify his premises.

For justifying the factual premises (1) and (2), Jones is free to refer to scientific research about PrEP prescription, but he needs to contextualize it. His concern is with the unique case under consideration. He is dealing with a particular sex worker in a particular social context and he needs to assess whether PrEP is likely to decrease the likelihood of his client's HIV infection *hic et nunc*. While research results about the biological effects of antiretrovirals will also apply to this case, the social conditions may be so different that prescription of ARVs may actually increase the risk of infection (e.g., through behavioural changes).

Jones must also justify the third premise of his reasoning that it is better that his client has a decreased risk of HIV infection. Since this seems rather straightforward, he can rely on his moral intuition, but he can also use ethical principles—for instance, from codes of ethics (e.g., that physicians should act in their patients' best interest). Interpreted as heuristic devices, they may help him to argue that prescription is the better choice. Furthermore, he may compare the issue under consideration to similar cases—for instance, to vaccination of prostitutes against the human papillomavirus (HPV) or against hepatitis C infection and even by analogizing it to the case of malaria prophylaxis (see Venter et al. 2014).

No matter what source of justification Jones uses, he must show that a decreased risk of infection is better *in the given context*. On the particularists' view, this requires that he makes use of moral discernment, which lies at the

⁸ Stating the argument in this way may seem pedantic, but it is helpful for understanding the logic of the account I am presenting in this paper. For the sake of clarity, I will also present the reasoning in a formal way, which may facilitate a better understanding of how simple reasons can be combined into complex reasons. Let 'p' mean 'I prescribe ARVs', let us use 'd' for 'The client has a decreased risk of HIV infection' and let '>' stand for the relation 'a is better than b'. If we symbolize the reasoning as suggested we obtain (1) $p \rightarrow d$, (2) $\neg p \rightarrow \neg d$, (3) $d > \neg d \models$ (4) $p > \neg p$. On the left side of ' \models ' (the "double turnstile") are the premises of the reasoning and on its right side is the conclusion, which can be *expressed* by saying 'I should prescribe ARVs'.

heart of particularist moral epistemology. This somewhat mysterious skill to discern what matters in a given situation has been the focus of much debate. Critics concede that it is plausible that we sometimes ‘just see’ that an option is morally wrong, particularly when we are dealing with simple issues. But they hold that the ‘perceptual model’ is open to serious judgmental distortions, such as special pleading (the agent may make exceptions in his own favour) and arbitrary resolutions of interpersonal disagreements. The literature on rational choice can add a considerable number of further biases that can undermine even the most carefully considered decisions of the particularist ethicist.⁹

The critics are certainly right in pointing out these epistemic challenges. But their objections do not show that the particularist method is fatally flawed. I think it is fair to say that any method that takes the complexity of ethical problems seriously must rely on what the philosophical tradition has called *phronēsis* (practical wisdom). It allows an ethicist, after careful consideration of the details of an ethical problem, to judge what is ethically relevant in the circumstances. And although its judgement is not infallible, which particularists readily admit (Dancy 2013), it plays an important role in the justification of ethical decisions.

3. COMPOSING COMPLEX REASONS FOR ACTION

In most real-life situations, a simple reason will not suffice for resolving an ethical issue. If, for example, someone argues for or against genetically modified crops he will put forward a potentially large number of reasons. This raises the question how these different reasons can be combined. In this section, I shall propose an answer to this question. It should be mentioned at the outset that any method of combining reasons that is compatible with particularism must allow that their combination is not simply additive. On the particularist view, reasons can combine in peculiar and irregular ways. They can interact and the addition of further reasons can therefore change the contribution a reason makes in a situation. It can become stronger or weaker, it can be annulled and its valence can be changed. In short, “how reasons present in a given circumstance combine to determine the overall moral status of the actions available in that circumstance varies from context to context” (Berker 2007, 125). As will become obvious below, the account presented in this section is compatible with these particularist constraints.

⁹ Compare to this debate, for instance, Hammond et al. (1999), McKeever and Ridge (2006) and Sinnott-Armstrong (1999).

3.1 Combining simple reasons

Whether the provision of ARVs decreases the risk of HIV infection is only one of the factors relevant in this case. Another consideration is that the patient may acquire HIV resistance (because current PrEP does not have enough suppressive power to prevent the development of HIV resistance). We can state this reason as follows:

(1') If I prescribe ARVs the client has a higher risk of developing HIV resistance.

(2') If I do not prescribe ARVs the client does not have a higher risk of developing HIV resistance.

(3') It is better that the client does not have a higher risk of developing HIV resistance.

(4') Therefore, I should not prescribe ARVs.¹⁰

It will be clear by now that this reasoning is valid and that the premises (1') – (3'), if justified, provide a *pro tanto* reason against ARV prescription.

Jones has now *two* simple reasons and we are seeking a robust and logically sound method for determining whether he has now a complex (i.e., two-dimensional) reason *for* ARV prescription or rather one *against* it. Authors commonly hold that if we have reasons for and against an action we need to determine which one of these reasons outweighs the other. However, the idea that some reasons can outweigh others is not only unclear, the conditions for weighing reasons are also not quite grasped, I think, by many authors who use the metaphor of weighing reasons.¹¹ In this section I shall therefore argue for *combining* simple reasons to multidimensional reasons rather than trying to weigh them.

To understand how this can be done, we first need to consider their factual premises (1) and (1') as well as (2) and (2'). To combine them, we can make use of the following general *composition rule*: $[(p \rightarrow q_1) \wedge (p \rightarrow q_2) \wedge \dots \wedge (p \rightarrow q_n)]$

¹⁰ If 'p' means again 'I prescribe ARVs', and 'r' stands for 'The client has a higher risk of developing HIV resistance' we obtain this formalized argument: (1') $p \rightarrow r$, (2') $\neg p \rightarrow \neg r$, (3') $\neg r > r \models$ (4') $\neg p > p$. The conclusion can be *expressed* by saying 'I should not prescribe ARVs'.

¹¹ Among the conditions that must be satisfied for specifying the weight of a given reason that is in conflict with its competitors are (i) a method of quantifying the degrees of justification involved in those reasons (justification admits of degrees, which make a reason stronger or weaker), (ii) a way of weighting each of the value dimensions (in our example, we need to determine whether the difference between having a decreased risk of HIV infection and not having a decreased risk of HIV infection is more important than the difference between having a higher risk of developing HIV resistance and not having a higher risk of developing HIV resistance), and (iii) preferential independence (roughly, the preferences on one dimension must be independent of the preferences on other dimensions). These conditions are, however, rarely met.

$\Leftrightarrow [p \rightarrow (q_1 \wedge q_2 \wedge \dots \wedge q_n)]$. This rule states that the conditional on the right side of the equivalence symbol ' \Leftrightarrow ' with the consequent made up of a conjunction of the propositions q_1, q_2, \dots, q_n is logically equivalent with the n conditionals $p \rightarrow q_i, i = 1, 2, \dots, n$, individually on the left side. This rule allows combining the descriptive premises of any number of unidimensional reasons into the descriptive premises of an n -dimensional reason (and it allows also decomposing the premises of multidimensional reasons into any number of one-dimensional reasons). In our example, (1) is the conditional statement 'If I prescribe ARVs the client has a decreased risk of HIV infection'—in its formalized version: $p \rightarrow d$ (see footnote 8), and (1') is the statement 'If I prescribe ARVs the client has a higher risk of developing HIV resistance'—formally: $p \rightarrow r$ (footnote 10). According to the composition rule, the two statements are logically equivalent to (1'') 'If I prescribe ARVs the client has a decreased risk of HIV infection *and* has a higher risk of developing HIV resistance'—formalized: $p \rightarrow (d \wedge r)$. By the same reasoning, the combination of (2) and (2') is logically equivalent to (2'') 'If I do not prescribe ARVs the client does not have a decreased risk of HIV infection *and* does not have a higher risk of developing HIV resistance'—formalized: $\neg p \rightarrow (\neg d \wedge \neg r)$.

As a result of this combination, Jones does not yet have a two-dimensional reason. He has only obtained its factual premises. On the account presented here, multidimensional reasoning requires that a reasoner constructs a *compound valuation* and infers the conclusion with its help. Suppose now that Jones regards it as better that the client has a decreased risk of HIV infection *and* has a higher risk of developing HIV resistance. His two-dimensional reasoning can then be stated as follows:

(1'') If I prescribe ARVs the client has a decreased risk of HIV infection *and* has a

higher risk of developing HIV resistance.

(2'') If I do not prescribe ARVs the client does not have a decreased risk of HIV

infection *and* does not have a higher risk of developing HIV resistance.

(3'') It is better that the client has a decreased risk of HIV infection *and* has a higher

risk of developing HIV resistance.

(4'') Therefore, I should prescribe ARVs.¹²

This argument is again logically correct. That is to say, if Jones has a justification for the premises he has a complex (i.e., two-dimensional) reason *for* prescribing ARVs. It should be noted that this reason is still a *pro tanto* reason.

¹² By choosing the familiar letters for the symbolized sentences, the formalized arguments is: $p \rightarrow (d \wedge r), \neg p \rightarrow (\neg d \wedge \neg r), (d \wedge r) > (\neg d \wedge \neg r) \models p > \neg p$.

That is, the addition of further reasons can have the result that there is an overall reason *against* prescribing the drugs.

For lack of space, I can only very briefly discuss the epistemic issues of multidimensional reasoning. The justification of the *factual premises* is quite straightforward. Since they are logically entailed by the factual premises of the simpler reasons (as we have seen in this section), the latter provide the justification for the former.¹³ The main problem is how to justify the *valuational premise* that the outcome of one option is better than the consequences of another. There exist methods, partly developed by decision theorists,¹⁴ which are certainly more art than science, but will nonetheless be of some help. According to particularism, the final judgement lies again with the competent moral judge and his skill of discernment (Dancy 2004, 143). Research suggests, however, that experts are quite unreliable at correctly integrating complex information (Zamzow 2015); and I therefore think it is fair to say that the distortions, mentioned in (2.2), are generally harder to avoid the more complex the reasons become.¹⁵

3.2 Some further clarifications

(i) *Adding further reasons*: Jones has now a two-dimensional reason *for* providing ARVs to his client. But this does not settle his ethical decision problem. There are more factors that need to be taken into consideration. For example, other people may be dying of untreated AIDS for want of those same drugs if he provides them to prostitutes for PrEP. This new simple reason *against* prescribing ARVs¹⁶ can be added to the two-dimensional reason *for* prescribing them to generate a three-dimensional reason.¹⁷ This process is iterative and can go on as long as new reasons emerge.

It is worth observing that the account presented here does not require adding only further one-dimensional reasons to a reason we already have. The method can be generalized. It is possible to combine a k -dimensional reason with an n -dimensional reason to obtain an $(n + k)$ -dimensional reason. Let a formalized example serve to illustrate this. Suppose the premises of your k -dimensional

¹³ Strictly speaking, this requires that justification is closed under deduction, which is widely accepted in the epistemological literature.

¹⁴ Among these techniques is the so-called *even swap method* which aims at reducing the number of dimensions to make a decision easier (see Hammond et al. 1999).

¹⁵ It should, however, be noticed that higher dimensional reasoning is not necessarily more difficult to handle. Sometimes it becomes valuationally easier because the simple reasons *for* (or *against*) one option become dominant.

¹⁶ If we use 'o' for 'other people are dying of untreated AIDS', the formalized reason is: $p \rightarrow o$, $\neg p \rightarrow \neg o$, $\neg o > o \models \neg p > p$.

¹⁷ In a formal presentation, this reason can be stated as follows: $p \rightarrow (d \wedge r \wedge o)$, $\neg p \rightarrow (\neg d \wedge \neg r \wedge \neg o)$, $(\neg d \wedge \neg r \wedge \neg o) > (d \wedge r \wedge o) \models \neg p > p$.

reason are $a \rightarrow (w \wedge x)$, $b \rightarrow (y \wedge z)$, and $(w \wedge x) > (y \wedge z)$; and the premises of your n -dimensional reason are $a \rightarrow (q \wedge r \wedge s)$, $b \rightarrow (t \wedge u \wedge v)$, and $(q \wedge r \wedge s) > (t \wedge u \wedge v)$. Our composition rule allows combining them to $a \rightarrow (q \wedge r \wedge s \wedge w \wedge x)$ and $b \rightarrow (t \wedge u \wedge v \wedge y \wedge z)$ and if you prefer the former consequent to the latter it follows the conclusion $a > b$. If your premises are justified you have now an $(n + k)$ -dimensional reason for a -ing.

(ii) *Decomposing reasons*: Suppose that Jones has now a three-dimensional reason *against* prescribing ARVs. But upon further research, it turns out that the premise of his third reason (that other people are dying for want of ARVs) is unjustified because a sufficient amount of drugs is now available. My account allows decomposing this three-dimensional reason in a logically correct way into a two-dimensional reason by removing the faulty reason.¹⁸ Since the process of decomposing reasons is also iterative (a multidimensional reason can always be broken down into one-dimensional reasons), the method is both flexible and robust. At any time in the process of reasoning, we can add new reasons if they become available and we can remove them if they turn out to be indefensible.

Be it noted that no matter how many dimensions and options we consider, a practical reason can virtually always be defeated by adding new dimensions or by adding new options. It is particularly important to note that practical reasoning is defeasible. Many ethical discussions are confused because debaters tend to propound one or a few reasons for their view and seem to think that settles the matter. Apparently, it does not occur to them that their reasoning can be defeated by new options or consequences not yet considered. Awareness that practical reasoning is defeasible is important for another reason, too. It partly explains why discussions about ethical problems (e.g., abortion) can drag on for many years without being ever resolved in a definite way. But if we understand this characteristic feature of practical reasoning we cannot expect that such intricate problems can be settled conclusively. Put differently, if we make a practical decision of some complexity it will always be a decision “in fear and trembling” (to borrow a phrase from S. Kierkegaard). We just do not know what to do “all things considered” because there may always be crucial factors, which we have overlooked.

4. CONCLUSION

Although the application of principles is still a commonly employed strategy to arrive at justified ethical decisions, there is no doubt that the particularist

¹⁸ This can easily be seen if we consider the formalized reasons. From $p \rightarrow (d \wedge r \wedge o)$ and $\neg(p \rightarrow o)$ it follows $p \rightarrow (d \wedge r)$ and from $\neg p \rightarrow (\neg d \wedge \neg r \wedge \neg o)$ and $\neg(\neg p \rightarrow \neg o)$ it follows $\neg p \rightarrow (\neg d \wedge \neg r)$, which are the factual premises of Jones’ two-dimensional reason.

method can, in the circumstances, be superior to the subsumptive model of ethical reasoning. By considering cases individually, it avoids a simplistic approach to ethical issues to which the principle-based method is prone. Many moral theorists working today agree that principles are not the whole of the story and that context matters when we consider ethical issues. It is this emphasis on the context-dependency of moral thinking that won particularism adherents. Particularists are convinced that taking all contextual features of a situation into account makes ethical reasoning more complex, but it also renders it more relevant.

As a method of *justifying* ethical decisions, particularism faces, however, problems. In particular, the reliance on the ethical insight of the experienced moral judge is epistemically questionable and may lead to downright prejudicial decisions. There is therefore need for further work on how bias in particularist reasoning can be avoided. But since particularism can be reconstructed as a logically valid mode of ethical reasoning, this article has shown that it can play an important role in ethical reasoning. The point I wish to close with is therefore that when the strengths and limits of particularism are properly understood, particularist reasoning is a useful and legitimate method of practical ethics.

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LA MORTE: QUESTIONE ONTOLOGICA O VALORIALE?

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ABSTRACT

Death is not simply a matter concerning scientific debates, but also a topic of ethical interest. In the present article we outline how transplants are deeply rooted in philosophical Modernity. On one hand, transplants in general and the concept of brain death have both been possible because of a philosophical way of thinking opposing mind and body. On the other, transplant medicine shows us, through facts such as "brain dead survivors" and "brain death pregnancies", that the premise on which philosophical Modernity is grounded (i.e. the human being as characterized by the opposition between mind and body) has to be considered wrong.

KEY WORDS

Transplant medicine, brain death criterion, philosophy of medicine, Postmodernism.

INTRODUZIONE

Il presente lavoro si propone di valutare lo stato della questione in merito al criterio di morte cerebrale: “la diagnosi di morte cerebrale deve essere considerata una definizione di *fatto* o deve essere piuttosto considerata una questione di *valore*? Una questione *biologica* o una questione *assiologica*?”¹ Detto altrimenti, indagheremo se la morte dell’essere umano chiami in causa l’ontologia (come sostiene per es. Shewmon), oppure l’etica (come affermano, a diverso titolo, Jonas e Singer). Inoltre, nel dare una risposta al quesito che guida la nostra indagine, andremo a considerare quali ricadute vi siano, per i trapianti, nel far propria ciascuna posizione.

¹ C. Viafora, *Introduzione alla bioetica*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2006, p. 338.

Un'ulteriore analisi che porremo in essere sarà quella che interroga il legame tra i trapianti e la definizione di morte cerebrale. Vi è chi sostiene che la morte cerebrale ha avuto l'impatto che si conosce - la sua diffusione planetaria a livello legislativo - proprio in virtù del suo permettere la pratica dei trapianti. Una volta che il criterio cerebrale di morte sia entrato in una condizione di crisi sul piano teorico (e presenteremo i principali esponenti che hanno condotto a tale crisi), non si incontra - nella sfera delle decisioni mediche - quel decremento dei trapianti che, forse, ci si sarebbe potuti aspettare, proprio pensando al legame di dipendenza rilevato, da alcuni studiosi, tra la morte cerebrale ed i trapianti.

Da parte nostra, porremo l'accento su di una lettura in chiave filosofica del rapporto tra i trapianti e la morte cerebrale, mostrando che entrambi i concetti sono, da un lato, il prodotto della Modernità filosofica (ne costituiscono, probabilmente, dei vertici), ma, dall'altro, ne chiamano in causa il superamento.

HANS JONAS

Il percorso di pensiero, che ha condotto Jonas a criticare il criterio di morte cerebrale, ha come punto di partenza la costitutiva impossibilità di identificare il momento esatto della morte: tale incapacità non è, per l'Autore, un qualcosa di transitorio, che, quindi, proprio in quanto tale, possa essere superato nell'arco del tempo. Al contrario, "trovandoci in" quella "zona di fondamentale incertezza" che corrisponde al "confine tra la vita e la morte"² (il quale, e non potrebbe essere altrimenti vista la premessa, è indeterminato)³ non rimane che offrire delle indicazioni improntate alla "vaghezza". È a questa vaghezza argomentativa che occorre, dunque, tenere a mente per comprendere le ragioni per le quali non si possa avere, rispetto alla morte, una conoscenza maggiore - nella direzione cioè dell'esattezza - di quella di cui, a dire di Jonas, si dispone. Attraverso un argomentare che, esplicitamente, prende le mosse da Aristotele, la conoscenza del reale viene divisa in due regioni: vi sono degli ambiti nei quali si dà l'esattezza conoscitiva, da un lato, ma non mancano ambiti nei quali tale caratteristica manca, dall'altro. Al filosofo non rimane che accettare questo dato di realtà: e, dunque, si tratta di "non pretendere una conoscenza dell'oggetto più precisa" [...] "di quanto l'oggetto stesso non

² H. Jonas, *Morte cerebrale e banca di organi umani: sulla ridefinizione pragmatica della morte*, in Rosangela Barcaro; Paolo Becchi (a cura di) *Questioni mortali. L'attuale dibattito sulla morte cerebrale e il problema dei trapianti*, ESI, Napoli 2004, pp. 47-67, p. 51.

³ *Ibid.*

consenta”⁴ - e questo in quanto “Certe forme del reale - tra cui forse l’ambito vita-morte - possono essere in se stesse ‘imprecise’ o può esserlo la conoscenza che di esse si può raggiungere.”⁵ Del resto, secondo l’Autore, una maggiore conoscenza non configurerebbe dei giovamenti; al contrario, sarebbe semplicemente superflua: infatti, “di fronte a una concezione cerebrale negativa chiaramente definita il medico può consentire al paziente di morire la sua morte secondo qualsiasi definizione, essa attraverserà da sé lo spettro di tutte le definizioni possibili.”⁶

Detta vaghezza, inerente il piano conoscitivo, si riproduce, pensiamo, anche per quanto attiene alla misurazione della capacità del paziente cerebralmente morto di sentire il dolore: come vi è incertezza in merito al momento della morte, vi è, altresì, un’incertezza in merito alla percezione che il paziente ha - o che comunque, potrebbe avere - di se medesimo. La soggettività profonda di tale paziente risulta quindi essere insondabile; ma che egli possa ancora esperire dolore, non viene escluso dal filosofo. Così, infatti, Jonas: “Chi può sapere se, quando il bisturi comincia a tagliare, non si causi uno shock, un ultimo trauma a una sensibilità diffusa, non cerebrale, ancora in grado di sentire il dolore, che noi, con le funzioni organiche, teniamo in vita?”⁷ Si badi che, attraverso quest’ultima affermazione, fa la sua comparsa una connotazione “olistica” del paziente cerebralmente morto - tema, questo, di grandissimo interesse sia filosofico (perché un dolore non connotabile come cerebrale configura un’incrinatura della concezione moderna della soggettività come intrinsecamente, ed inesorabilmente, caratterizzata dalla dimensione mentale), che di tipo pratico (inerente il comportamento etico da tenersi nei suoi confronti). Tale “sensibilità diffusa” - va precisato - non è, secondo Jonas, la sola esemplificazione di un piano globale, che interessa cioè la corporeità nel suo insieme: le attività artificialmente indotte della respirazione e della nutrizione ne rappresentano il caso più emblematico.

Sottosistemi locali - singole cellule o tessuti - possono benissimo continuare a funzionare per un certo lasso di tempo (per esempio la crescita dei capelli e delle unghie) senza che questo influisca sulla determinazione della morte secondo i criteri più ampi. Ma respirazione e circolazione sanguigna non rientrano in questa classe, perché l’effetto della loro attività, benché espletata da sottosistemi,

⁴ H. Jonas, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁵ H. Jonas, *loc. cit.*

⁶ H. Jonas, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

⁷ H. Jonas, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

si estende all'intero sistema e assicura il mantenimento sia funzionale che sostanziale di tutte le altre parti.⁸

Da parte nostra, occorre, dunque, focalizzarci sulla curvatura globale che hanno assunto le funzioni artificiali (respirazione e nutrizione) con riferimento al corpo del paziente, per coglierne le ricadute per il pensiero stesso dell'Autore. Vi è, anzitutto, un'implicazione decisiva, in quanto è proprio il rilievo di queste componenti diffuse a fare la differenza in materia della morte dell'essere umano. Se, come detto, non vi è modo di discernere - sul versante conoscitivo - la vita e la morte, possiamo, tuttavia, pervenire a delle definizioni di che cosa sia l'una e di che cosa, invece, sia l'altra. Non vi è, certamente, un confine di natura epistemologica (quantificabile) tra le due. Eppure, vita e morte possono essere distinte sul piano concettuale, con la conclusione che i pazienti nella condizione di morte cerebrale non possono essere ritenuti dei cadaveri, poiché non vi è una discontinuità tale, tra loro e gli altri esseri umani, da richiedere che siano definiti attraverso un cambiamento di status.

Naturale ed artificiale qui si ibridano, al punto da essere, a ben vedere, indistinguibili.

Di fronte alla stratificazione e all'interdipendenza delle funzioni dell'organismo, così pare alla mia mente di profano, la spontaneità si *distribuisce* su molti livelli e luoghi, e ogni livello superiore consente a quelli a esso inferiori di funzionare in modo naturale e spontaneo, sia che la propria attività sia naturale o artificiale.⁹

La discontinuità che abbiamo richiamato, vi sarebbe, invece, in due casi distinti e, tuttavia, convergenti nel considerare cruciale la distinzione tra naturale ed artificiale: ovvero, da un lato, per chi ritenesse che l'autentica vita umana sia solamente quella descrivibile come "naturale", oppure (come vogliono i corticalisti) quella "personale". Ma è lo stesso Jonas ad informarci che qui una separazione di questo tipo non ha alcun motivo di sussistere:

[...] la vecchia concezione, per quanto ne so, non specifica affatto che l'attività organica, la cui irreversibile cessazione costituisce la morte, dev'essere *spontanea* e che non si debba considerare vita se è indotta e sostenuta artificialmente [...]. Per essere precisi, l'"irreversibile" di questa cessazione può riferirsi a due cose: alla funzione stessa o alla sua spontaneità. Una cessazione può essere irreversibile in quanto a spontaneità, ma ancora reversibile rispetto all'attività in quanto tale, nel qual caso un attivatore esterno dovrebbe subentrare costantemente a quello interno, ovvero alla spontaneità perduta. È

⁸ H. Jonas, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

⁹ H. Jonas, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-58.

questo il caso dei movimenti respiratori e delle contrazioni cardiache del paziente in coma (e anche, di recente, del cuore artificiale!).¹⁰

Per continuare nella ricostruzione del pensiero di Jonas, dobbiamo affermare che, sebbene egli insista a più riprese sulla mancanza di un confine certo tra la vita e la morte, non vi è alcun modo di pensare che i pazienti in morte cerebrale siano, in realtà, dei cadaveri. L'argomento dell'interdipendenza tra naturale ed artificiale - diretta conseguenza, del resto, di quello dell'"interdipendenza delle funzioni dell'organismo" - non può lasciar dubbi in merito: qui si esclude a chiare lettere che la loro condizione sia diversa da quella della vita. Eppure, i ragionamenti di Jonas prendono una coloritura particolare: egli, nonostante abbia bene a mente la condizione di vita dei pazienti in morte cerebrale, non considera la morte come una questione ontologica - come, invece, sarà il caso di Shewmon -, quanto come una questione etica.¹¹ Questa soluzione teorica - che può apparire, ad un lettore distratto, come un punto critico nell'economia delle argomentazioni del filosofo (semplicemente una virata o un paradosso) - è, tuttavia, comprensibile, se solamente si consideri il quadro teorico di fondo dell'Autore. Jonas non è qui in contraddizione rispetto a se stesso; al contrario, il suo ragionamento è del tutto coerente: è la stessa premessa, su cui poggiano tutti i suoi rilievi in merito alla morte, ad escludere la posizione che ravvisa nella morte una questione di carattere ontologico. Allora - ecco la conclusione - poiché la morte non può essere quantificata o misurata, non resta che affidarla alle considerazioni etiche. Così Jonas:

E qui, a mio giudizio, la domanda giusta non è: «È morto il paziente?», ma: «Che fare di lui», che resta pur sempre un paziente? A *questa* domanda non si può certo rispondere con una definizione di morte, ma con una 'definizione' dell'uomo e di che cos'è una vita umana. In altre parole, non si può aggirare la questione decretando che la morte è già avvenuta e perciò il corpo rientra nell'ambito delle semplici cose; bensì la risposta che la questione richiede può essere, ad esempio, che non è umanamente giusto - e meno che mai necessario - prolungare artificialmente la vita di un corpo privo di cervello.¹²

Alla luce di quanto abbiamo appena ascoltato, bisogna, quindi, riconsiderare il confine tra la vita e la morte: queste non devono più essere intese, quindi, come delle questioni di fatto; se non sul terreno epistemologico,

¹⁰ H. Jonas, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

¹¹ Si instaura così un inaspettato parallelismo tra le posizioni di H. Jonas e quelle di P. Singer, *Rethinking Life & Death* (1994), tr. it., *Ripensare la vita*, il Saggiatore, Milano 2000 (per es. alle pp. 66-67).

¹² H. Jonas, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

esse sono, tuttavia, separabili dall'analisi etica che ha nel paziente stesso (e non per es. nella società, nella figura dei possibili riceventi) il termine ultimo di giudizio. Cercando di portare a coerenza l'implicito dell'Autore che andiamo analizzando, si tratta di riscontrare che proprio il confine vita-morte viene ora a precisarsi lungo la linea di separazione tra mezzi ordinari e mezzi straordinari¹³ di trattamento. In ciò va riscontrata la profonda attualità di Jonas. "Grazie a questa motivazione filosofica difficilmente contestabile - l'assurdità per un essere umano di continuare a vegetare in modo incosciente -, il medico può, o addirittura deve staccare il respiratore e rimettere alla morte il compito di definire se stessa attraverso ciò che inevitabilmente accade."¹⁴

La ricostruzione che finora abbiamo effettuato, ci ha permesso di cogliere gli aspetti che riteniamo essere di maggior rilievo della posizione di Jonas. E questi sono:

1. l'individuazione di componenti olistiche nei pazienti in morte cerebrale; le più importanti delle quali sono la respirazione e nutrizione artificiale, ma non si dimentichi la stessa possibilità, almeno ipotetica, di sentire il dolore;
2. il fatto che l'Autore sottragga la morte al terreno dell'ontologia, facendola rientrare nel campo dell'etica.

Il primo punto ci permette di valutare le ricadute del discorso di Jonas sul tema della morte umana - che saranno proprie anche, come vedremo, di Shewmon -, mentre il secondo sancisce una distanza tra il filosofo, come detto a favore della curvatura etica della morte, ed il neurologo, che, invece, la considera su base ontologica.¹⁵

D. ALAN SHEWMON

Ci accingiamo ora a ricostruire il pensiero di Shewmon per quanto attiene alla morte cerebrale; nel far questo, teniamo a mente gli aspetti che abbiamo sottolineato del lavoro di Jonas: così facendo, mostreremo, in altri termini, i punti di contatto - e di frizione - tra questi due autori, certamente molto simili.

¹³ Per un inquadramento di questo tema, si cfr. F. Tuoldo, *L'etica di fine vita*, Città Nuova, Roma 2010; S. Bartoccioni, *et al.*, *Dall'altra parte*, Rizzoli, Milano 2008.

¹⁴ H. Jonas, *op. cit.*, p. 58. Cfr., inoltre, p. 49.

¹⁵ D.A. Shewmon, "'Brain-stem Death', 'Brain Death' and Death: a A Critical Re-Evaluation of the Purported Equivalence", *Issues in Law & Medicine*, 1998, 14(2), pp. 125-145, tr. it. *'Morte del tronco cerebrale', 'morte cerebrale' e morte: un riesame critico della loro presunta equivalenza*, in R. Barcaro; P. Becchi (a cura di), *Questioni mortali*, cit., pp. 177-204, p. 182.

La parabola di Shewmon è particolarmente significativa in quanto, da iniziale sostenitore del criterio di morte cerebrale, è andato via via distanziandosi da esso - passando per l'adesione alla morte corticale -, concludendo tale percorso con il fornire una propria definizione di morte e proponendo, inoltre, dei criteri corrispondenti. Egli sostiene che la morte cerebrale rappresenti l'equivalente di una "vacca grassa", che, in quanto tale, viene "presevata a tutti i costi"¹⁶ dalla comunità dei bioeticisti, prescindendo completamente dal fatto che "La principale giustificazione fisiologica per la 'morte cerebrale' è diventata progressivamente insostenibile"¹⁷, in quanto non più proponibile perché sconfessata da una serie di casi - su cui diremo. La conclusione cui l'Autore giunge è allora quella di decretare l'equivalenza tra la "morte corporea" e la morte cerebrale come "logicamente e fisiologicamente incoerente".¹⁸

Fin qui abbiamo descritto le conclusioni cui è pervenuto il neurologo, andiamo a considerare, le ragioni che lo hanno condotto ad abbandonare tale "dogma":¹⁹ si tratta, allora, di riconoscere come il suo affrancarsi dalla morte cerebrale²⁰ sia dipeso, in prima istanza, da osservazioni - indirette e dirette - cui è stato condotto dalla sua stessa professione di neurologo. Egli, infatti, viene a conoscenza di un ventaglio di casi, connotabile sotto il segno della "sopravvivenza" nella condizione di morte cerebrale: ecco che vi sono due categorie di esseri umani - pazienti pediatrici e donne in stato di gravidanza - i quali, pur essendo cerebralmente morti - vengono mantenuti alle apparecchiature di sostegno vitale. Ebbene, ne risulta che detti pazienti - piuttosto che andare incontro, come ci si aspetterebbe, all'"imminente arresto cardiaco"²¹ - sono in grado di svolgere funzioni complesse come, da un lato, portare a termine una gravidanza (con successo, oppure no)²², e, dall'altro, semplicemente continuare a "vivere" e, inoltre, a crescere: circostanza, questa, che significa, per alcuni, anche raggiungere la pubertà. La casistica oggetto di

¹⁶ D.A. Shewmon, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ D.A. Shewmon, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

²⁰ E' lo stesso D.A. Shewmon, del resto, a sostenere di essere "guarito" dalla morte cerebrale (Id., "Recovery from 'brain death'. A neurologist's apology", *The Linacre Quarterly*, 1997; 64(1), pp. 30-96).

²¹ Tale è, infatti, la convinzione già di Mollaret e Goulon, cfr. R. Barcaro, "Ai confini della vita. Riflessione critica sulla nozione di morte cerebrale", *Humana.Mente* 3 (Novembre 2007), pp. 19-37, p. 19.

²² Si ricordi, in proposito, quanto sostenuto da H. Jonas, *Una madre morta con un feto vivo in corpo? Due lettere*, in Rosangela Barcaro; Paolo Becchi (a cura di) *Questioni mortali*, cit., pp. 69-76.

studio da parte di Shewmon comprende circa 175 casi, nei quali è riscontrabile una sopravvivenza oltre la settimana: di questi, 159 sono presenti nella letteratura medica, 10 casi sono stati riportati dai media, mentre di 4 casi, l'Autore è venuto a conoscenza attraverso dei colleghi, ed, infine, egli ha potuto analizzare direttamente 2 casi²³ - tra i quali va ricordato quello di TK,²⁴ paziente pediatrico con una sopravvivenza in morte cerebrale (di 14 anni e mezzo nel momento in cui Shewmon scrive)²⁵ dai quattro ai ventitre anni.²⁶

La casistica che abbiamo, poc'anzi, richiamato porta l'Autore a concludere che "il corpo cerebralmente morto" è un organismo umano vivente";²⁷ attraverso la disamina di detti casi, quindi, è possibile vedere la mancanza di tenuta per quanto concerne il prerequisite stesso del criterio di morte cerebrale. Non pare, infatti, più sostenibile quella concezione che guardava al cervello come all'"organo critico" dell'integrazione corporea: "Pertanto una lesione cerebrale può paralizzare le facoltà intellettuali e volitive dell'anima - può prevenire la loro attivazione o realizzazione - senza necessariamente causare che l'anima cessi di guidare il corpo in quanto suo principio vitale."²⁸ Del resto, "Se l'unità integrativa del corpo dipendesse dal funzionamento cerebrale, allora il corpo dovrebbe sicuramente cadere a pezzi per una separazione funzionale dal cervello così come per la distruzione del cervello stesso."²⁹

Forse - e questa è la nostra ipotesi -, il ruolo di integrazione del cervello nei confronti del corpo vi è stato nel passato, agli esordi della ventilazione meccanica - si pensi alle osservazioni cliniche di Mollaret e Goulon, attraverso le quali veniva rilevata la vicinanza cronologica tra il *coma dépassé* e l'arresto cardiaco - tuttavia, successivamente ai rilievi di Shewmon, non rimane che constatare che "se c'è un corpo umano vivo, c'è ipso facto una persona umana viva"³⁰. Successivamente alle sopravvivenze in morte cerebrale, ci sui Shewmon ci informa, non è più possibile guardare alla morte cerebrale come in precedenza: qui è il campo pratico a presentare dei fatti che conducono, necessariamente, a modificare quello teorico. "Sebbene coloro i quali riducono

²³ D.A., Shewmon, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

²⁴ D.A., Shewmon, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

²⁵ D.A., Shewmon, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

²⁶ Cfr. P. Becchi, "I segni della morte e la questione dei trapianti", *i-lex. Scienze Giuridiche, Scienze Cognitive e Intelligenza Artificiale*, Novembre 2011; 12, pp. 1-20, p. 6, in rete: www.i-lex.it.

²⁷ D.A., Shewmon, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

²⁸ D.A., Shewmon, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

²⁹ D.A., Shewmon, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

³⁰ D.A., Shewmon, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

la persona alla coscienza possano provare ad argomentare che questi non sono *persone* umane, nessuno può seriamente pretendere che non siano *organismi* umani viventi, *esseri* umani viventi.”³¹

È, quindi - riassumendo -, del tutto contestabile che “Il ‘sistema critico’ del corpo sia il cervello”, ma, per richiamare un’ulteriore aspetto del lavoro di Shewmon, occorre riconoscere che “addirittura” è sconfessata nettamente l’idea che “il corpo possieda anche un ‘sistema critico’ localizzato.”³² Nelle battute che abbiamo ascoltato è racchiusa tutta la distanza di Shewmon rispetto alla definizione di morte sancita dalla scienza (almeno in un primo momento) e dalla maggior parte delle legislazioni mondiali - si badi: con alcune eccezioni significative (il Giappone ed il New Jersey).

Le analisi di Shewmon sono tali da richiedere un’attenta considerazione di alcune domande:

1. “Ma se la ‘morte cerebrale’ non è la morte, che cosa è?”;³³
2. Quale ruolo assume il cervello nella mutata cornice di riferimento?;
3. Se non è la morte cerebrale, che cos’è, allora, la morte dell’essere umano?

Vediamo meglio: quanto alla morte cerebrale, occorre riconoscere il duplice ordine di considerazioni che la attraversa: 1) essa non viene più riconosciuta come la morte dell’essere umano (e questo vale tanto per Jonas che per Shewmon), tuttavia, 2) continua a mantenere un ruolo di tutto rilievo per quanto attiene all’espianto degli organi. La morte cerebrale viene, dunque, intesa come il momento dell’interruzione dei mezzi straordinari, diviene perciò lecito il prelievo degli organi con la finalità di trapianto.

In merito al cervello, invece, dobbiamo notare che viene - e di molto - ridimensionata la sua importanza in riferimento alla vita dell’essere umano: le attività che esso svolge sono - e non potrebbe essere altrimenti - ora descrivibili semplicemente come un supporto dato al resto del corpo. L’apporto del cervello passa, quindi, dall’essere fondamentale - in quanto ciò che conferisce

³¹ D.A., Shewmon, *op. cit.*, p. 191. Un ragionamento analogo viene posto in essere da Shewmon (*op. cit.*, p. 203) riguardo all’embrione: “Sebbene l’idea della ‘vita cerebrale’ sia contraddetta da considerazioni fisiologiche dell’unità integrativa (niente è un ‘organismo come un tutto’ più chiaramente di un embrione in fase di sviluppo, nonostante l’assenza di un cervello)”. E ancora: “Le piante e gli embrioni non hanno un organo di integrazione centrale; l’integrazione è piuttosto un fenomeno emergente chiramente non localizzabile che coinvolge l’interazione reciproca tra tutte le parti.” (Id., *Disconnessione tra encefalo e corpo: implicazioni per il fondamento teorico della morte cerebrale*, in R. De Mattei, *Finis Vitae. La morte cerebrale è ancora vita?*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 2007, pp. 277-331, p. 306).

³² D.A., Shewmon, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

³³ D.A., Shewmon, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

al corpo quell'indirizzo che, esso, da solo, non sarebbe mai in grado di darsi -, all'essere, piuttosto, un qualcosa di relativo. Il cervello è ora nient'altro che ciò che segue (ciò che mima, verrebbe quasi da dire) la coordinazione dei vari organi: si presti la massima attenzione - quella coordinazione che il corpo ha già precedentemente raggiunto.³⁴ Se nella prima ipotesi era il corpo ad uniformarsi al cervello, ora le parti si sono invertite. Così Shewmon:

Lungi dal costituire un 'integratore centrale', senza il quale il corpo si ridurrebbe ad una mera collezione di organi, il cervello serve come modulatore, regolatore di precisione, ottimizzatore, esaltatore, protettore di una unità somatica implicitamente *già esistente, intrinsecamente mediata*. L'unità integrativa *non* è un'imposizione *dall'alto* di un 'integratore centrale' ad un conglomerato di organi altrimenti non integrato. (Se lo fosse, anche il corpo in salute sarebbe privo di una *vera* unità, ma consisterebbe piuttosto di un cervello portato in giro e tenuto vivo da parti corporee microgestite in modo dittatoriale). Invece, è una *caratteristica non localizzata, olistica* fondata sulla mutua interazione di tutte le parti del corpo.³⁵

Non rimane, a questo punto dell'indagine, che considerare la proposta dell'Autore quanto alla morte dell'essere umano: qui l'impianto è ancora di carattere aristotelico; quanto cerchiamo deve ancora soddisfare - come oramai risulta chiaro - il prerequisito della globalità: "La transizione tra la vita e la morte è caratterizzata invece da segni empirici per cui il 'corpo' non è più in effetti un corpo, cioè un tutto dinamicamente integrato."³⁶ Lo stadio olistico al quale risulta possibile far corrispondere - tanto per Jonas che per Shewmon - la morte, non può - anche in virtù delle ragioni che vedremo nel paragrafo successivo - che essere la corporeità medesima. "Il *criterio anatomico* [della morte] si sposta da un singolo *locus* (il cervello) all'intero corpo e consiste in un grado critico di danno a livello molecolare (non ancora ampiamente individuabile) in tutto il corpo, oltre un 'punto di non ritorno' termodinamico."³⁷ Senza che ciò configuri, tuttavia, un ritorno alla morte tradizionale (a base cardiopolmonare): e qui tocchiamo un altro punto di convergenza tra Jonas e Shewmon. È comune ad entrambi, infatti, una concezione per la quale l'ingresso della tecnica nell'area della fine della vita umana non può essere ignorato.³⁸ Così, dunque, Shewmon:

Sebbene l'espressione 'circolatorio-respiratorio' suoni in modo simile alla vecchia frase 'cardiopolmonare', non sono sinonimi. Né il battito cardiaco

³⁴ Il riferimento all'embrione è qui decisamente illuminante, cfr. *supra* la cit. alla nota 31.

³⁵ D.A., Shewmon, *op. cit.*, pp. 197-198.

³⁶ D.A. Shewmon, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

³⁷ D.A. Shewmon, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

³⁸ Per Jonas, cfr. *supra* la nota n. 12.

spontaneo, né la respirazione polmonare sono essenziali per la vita (come effettivamente probano le macchine per il *bypass* cardiopolmonare, ma la circolazione e la respirazione chimica (il processo respiratorio) lo *sono*.³⁹

LE FUNZIONI INTEGRATIVE

La prospettiva di Shewmon sulla “*litania*” - l’Autore impiega tale termine con un intento critico verso coloro che considerano ancora il cervello come l’organo critico del corpo - “*delle funzioni integrative*”⁴⁰ è già presente nell’articolo di Jonas che abbiamo considerato. I due autori constatano, come detto a più riprese, un’integrazione a livello autenticamente olistico presente nel corpo privo delle funzioni del cervello - andando (come abbiamo visto per Jonas, e come vedremo, per Shewmon) a dare un’interpretazione di come debbano essere intese la respirazione e la nutrizione artificiale. Ma prima, facciamo un passo indietro, per osservare come Shewmon caratterizza un organismo integrato:

L’ ‘unità integrativa’ è posseduta da un presunto organismo (cioè, è realmente un organismo) se quest’ultimo possiede almeno una proprietà emergente, di livello olistico. Una proprietà di un corpo composto è detta ‘emergente’ se deriva dalla reciproca interazione delle parti, e ‘olistica’ se non è riferibile a qualche singola parte o sottoinsieme di parti ma soltanto all’intero corpo composto.⁴¹

Si noti come sia bastevole la presenza di “almeno una proprietà emergente” per configurare un organismo vivente; ci pare che questa considerazione sia improntata all’insegna di una prospettiva prudentiale - e che, quindi, possa esservi, anche se più tenue rispetto ad altre somiglianze, un altro punto di incontro tra gli autori che stiamo trattando.⁴² Può essere di interesse rilevare che, nel caso di Shewmon, le “proprietà emergenti” non rappresentano, solamente, un fattore chiave nella separazione tra la vita e la morte, ma che sono, altresì, centrali con riferimento alle situazioni e della salute e della malattia. “Gli organismi viventi in buona salute possiedono molte di tali proprietà [integrative] laddove un organismo malato potrebbe possederne meno. Ma una soltanto è sufficiente perché *sia* un organismo, in quanto se la proprietà è veramente al livello del tutto, ci deve essere un tutto a cui essa sia

³⁹ D.A. Shewmon, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

⁴⁰ D.A. Shewmon, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

⁴¹ D.A. Shewmon, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

⁴² Delle ragioni prudentiali ispirano, come noto, la filosofia di Jonas sia in generale che, nello specifico, le sue considerazioni riguardanti la morte umana.

riferita.”⁴³ Vogliamo sottolineare quella che riteniamo sia la grande coerenza del discorso di Shewmon: qui egli sta trattando della malattia, all'interno della quale, a ben vedere, si tratta di far rientrare, a suo avviso, la stessa morte cerebrale: detto altrimenti, la morte cerebrale non può più essere confusa con la morte dell'essere umano, ma va intesa come una forma di disabilità - e, dunque, di vita. Così Shewmon a supporto di questa tesi:

Non c'è dubbio che molti corpi 'cerebralmente morti' nelle unità di terapia intensiva richiedono meno supporto tecnologico di molti altri pazienti malati in modo grave o morenti in quegli stessi reparti, e che ciononostante sono considerati da tutti come vivi. [...] Allora i pazienti 'cerebralmente morti', che presentano *maggior*e integrazione del soggetto dell'esempio, devono essere vivi.⁴⁴

Si consideri come, da quanto appena ascoltato, il confine vita-morte vada affidato alle funzioni integrative; ma trattiamo ora alle esemplificazioni probabilmente più paradigmatiche di queste (respirazione e nutrizione artificiale). L'analisi è tesa a discernere una modalità erronea ed una corretta di considerarle: sottolineiamo che lo snodo centrale tra tali differenze interpretative consiste nel considerare, - in riferimento alla morte - nutrizione e respirazione come dei fenomeni del tutto naturali (secondo il modo sbagliato), o come artificiali a pieno titolo (per quanto concerne la corretta interpretazione).

Se 'respirare' è concepito come spostare l'aria dentro e fuori dei polmoni, è una funzione del diaframma coordinata dal tronco cerebrale. Se, invece, è concepita come 'respirazione' nel senso tecnico di scambio dell'ossigeno e di anidride carbonica (più rilevante per l'unità integrativa), allora è una funzione chimica dei mitocondri in ogni cellula del corpo. (Infatti, la serie finale delle macromolecole coinvolte nella produzione di energia dal processo ossidativo del combustibile chimico è conosciuta come 'catena respiratoria').⁴⁵

E lo stesso dicasi per quanto attiene alla nutrizione:

Similmente, se 'nutrizione' è inteso come mangiare, è una funzione della bocca e della faringe coordinate dal cervello. Se, invece, è compreso come la scissione e l'assimilazione di sostanze nutritive per fornire energia e materia prima per l'organismo (il solo senso rilevante per la integrazione comatica) allora è sia una funzione del tratto gastrointestinale sia una funzione chimica di ogni cellula del corpo.⁴⁶

⁴³ D.A. Shewmon, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

⁴⁴ D.A. Shewmon, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

⁴⁵ D.A. Shewmon, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

⁴⁶ D.A. Shewmon, *loc. cit.*

Detto altrimenti, ci troviamo ancora davanti alla domanda che indaga quale sia il contributo della tecnica per quanto riguarda la fine della vita umana. Siamo giunti così ad un bivio: se imbocchiamo la prima strada, se cioè l'intervento tecnico fosse tale da non incidere sulla condizione del paziente - ovvero sulla sua integrazione corporea -, allora, potremmo tranquillamente considerare tali pazienti come dei cadaveri a pieno titolo. Eppure - sia per Jonas che per Shewmon -, non è questo il caso. Ed eccoci così giunti al secondo tragitto: la tecnologia non configura qui un mero apporto quantitativo, ma qualitativo - dove con tale termine, lo precisiamo, è da intendersi un intervento che non incide sull'integrazione corporea, mentre è "qualitativa", a tutti gli effetti, quella modificazione che coinvolge il piano globale della coordinazione dell'organismo.

Si presti la massima attenzione: la stessa tecnica, come sopra abbiamo richiamato, è - probabilmente - passata da uno stadio iniziale nel quale essa era sì incapace, per così dire, di procedere oltre il piano che abbiamo descritto come quantitativo (e questo è il caso almeno di Mollaret e Goulon), ad uno nel quale, questa volta, ne va del piano qualitativo. Detto altrimenti, modificandosi la strumentazione tecnologica, cambiano altresì di segno le analisi etiche: ecco che, alla fine degli anni Cinquanta, la morte poteva essere intesa come morte cerebrale - e, quindi, era etico procedere, senza presentare ulteriori giustificazioni teoriche, all'espianto degli organi, ecc. (lo stesso si potrebbe affermare per es. in riferimento a Barnard). Ma dei miglioramenti sul versante della ventilazione artificiale hanno fatto mutare la stessa nozione di morte - che non può più essere accettata nella sua versione "cerebrale", né in quella "corticale" -, ed hanno portato ad una concezione etica che chiede siano espresse ulteriori motivazioni per procedere ai trapianti. Con ciò non si vuol dire che lo scenario dei trapianti sia escluso - tutt'altro-, ma che occorre fornire loro una giustificazione che non passi, questa volta, per il criterio di morte cerebrale. Riassumendo, l'elemento tecnico ora - ovvero con le analisi di Jonas e Shewmon - ha a che fare con l'integrazione dell'organismo, mentre agli esordi, la sua incidenza non poteva estendersi a tanto.

In realtà è proprio questo il punto fondamentale: una cosa era parlare di morte quando la medicina non possedeva alcun mezzo per intervenire efficacemente nel processo del morire, una cosa è parlarne oggi, quando un numero crescente di funzioni è sostituibile. D'altro canto è proprio il progresso tecnologico che ha fatto nascere questi nuovi problemi concettuali.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ C.A. Defanti, *Riflessioni sul concetto di morte cerebrale*, in M. Mori (a cura di), *La bioetica. Questioni morali e politiche per il futuro dell'uomo*, Bibliotechne, Milano 1991, pp. 230-237, p. 233.

Pensiamo si possa dire che tali casi di sopravvivenze in morte cerebrale non vi sarebbero state senza i progressi nella ventilazione meccanica e nelle tecnologie di supporto vitale. A partire da questo rilievo, se guardiamo alla questione in un'ottica diacronica, non possiamo non riconoscere che 1) vi è stato - almeno - un tempo nel quale dette sopravvivenze non si verificavano, pur in presenza della ventilazione artificiale (ancora una volta, il riferimento d'obbligo è rappresentato da Mollaret e Goulon); mentre 2) vi sono state, diversi anni dopo, delle sopravvivenze in morte cerebrale - le quali non si verificavano, invece, nel primo caso: una tecnologia, forse ancora rudimentale, non era, infatti, in grado di evitare l'arresto cardiaco. Diviene, quindi, necessario distinguere tra due fasi dello sviluppo delle tecnologie di sostegno vitale: una prima, nella quale la tecnica non forniva al corpo un'integrazione autenticamente olistica, ed una, invece, nella quale questa era fornita.⁴⁸

LA MORTE UMANA: QUESTIONE ASSIOLOGICA O ONTOLOGICA?

Da quanto andiamo dicendo, sono emersi due scenari distinti per quanto attiene alla considerazione di come vada intesa la morte: da un lato, abbiamo una posizione che esordisce con il dichiarare che siamo consegnati ad una "vaghezza" invalicabile, quando ci proponiamo di accertare la morte, per terminare con il consegnare i pazienti cerebralmente morti alle analisi di carattere etico (Jonas). Dall'altro, vi è chi, connotando la morte come una questione ontologica - e, quindi, ritenendo che questa possa essere determinata, se non con esattezza, quantomeno caso per caso -, cerca lo sganciamento dei trapianti dalla morte cerebrale (Shewmon). A queste posizioni ne aggiungiamo una terza, quella di Singer,⁴⁹ per il quale vi sono diverse condizioni a partire dalle quali diviene lecito il prelievo degli organi (e tali condizioni sono la morte cerebrale, quella a sua volta corticale - ovvero lo stato vegetativo - e l'anencefalia).

Se disponiamo la gamma delle posizioni possibili lungo una linea retta, che parta da quella "conservatrice", per giungere alla posizione maggiormente radicale, abbiamo i seguenti scenari:

1. Attraverso la morte cerebrale non si viene ancora a configurare il momento del sì all'espianto degli organi, mentre vi è la possibilità di rimuovere il paziente dalla ventilazione meccanica (verso la quale lo

⁴⁸ Queste affermazioni non possono che avere una valenza parziale, ipotetica, in quanto si deve tenere a mente che le sopravvivenze di cui parliamo non sarebbero state possibili senza le richieste provenienti dai genitori e dai coniugi.

⁴⁹ Cfr. per es. P. Singer, *supra*, alla nota 11.

stesso Jonas pare, in parte propendere, anche se non mancano, altresì, nel suo lavoro, delle aperture ai trapianti);

2. Risulta possibile tanto scollegare il paziente in morte cerebrale che espianare gli organi;⁵⁰
3. Viene radicalizzata la posizione precedente, e, quindi, altri soggetti fanno la loro comparsa in quanto donatori.

IL RAPPORTO TRA I TRAPIANTI E LA MORTE CEREBRALE

I trapianti, per quanto concerne la pratica clinica, sono stati giustificati - inizialmente⁵¹ - attraverso una strategia che ha inteso stabilire la morte dell'essere umano su base cerebrale, con la conclusione che, trattandosi di un cadavere, non sono stati sollevati dei problemi etici per l'espianare degli organi. L'argomento della morte cerebrale - che possiamo definire a pieno titolo come "ontologico" - è stato, quindi, l'anticamera per gli esordi gli stessi trapianti, come per il loro consolidamento. Dato questo quadro di riferimento, si sarebbe portati a pensare che i trapianti abbiano proprio nella definizione di morte cerebrale (e nel suo accertamento) la principale condizione di possibilità: parrebbe, infatti, che, una volta che la morte cerebrale sia attraversata da dubbi - che ne incrinano, se non la validità, quantomeno, per così dire, l'autorevolezza - non vi sia alcuno spazio per la pratica dei trapianti. Eppure, le cose stanno diversamente: niente pare scalfire la medicina dei trapianti: neppure la gamma dei critici - sempre più numerosi - del criterio di morte cerebrale si spinge fino al punto di compiere il passo della messa in discussione dei trapianti (è bene richiamare questo aspetto). E questo fatto sembrerebbe dire che, in fondo, non vi sia alcuna relazione (nelle versioni più radicali) o che detta relazione sia, a ben vedere, debole, tra i trapianti e la morte cerebrale. Ma vi è un'ulteriore scenario, per il quale i trapianti configurerebbero dei vantaggi tali che non pare saggio procedere ad una loro critica.

Vi è, allora, chi sostiene una prospettiva che privilegia l'indipendenza dei trapianti rispetto alla questione della morte cerebrale, affermando che i trapianti sono una questione di carattere etico (Jonas e Singer); tale tesi può,

⁵⁰ Tale posizione, oltre che proposta da Shewmon, è condivisa da C.A. Defanti ("La morte cerebrale come paradigma della bioetica", in R. Barcaro; P. Becchi, *Questioni mortali*, cit., pp. 231-250) e dal Danish Council of Ethics.

⁵¹ Non può certo essere un caso che il primo documento successivo al trapianto di cuore ad opera di Barnard abbia sancito l'equivalenza tra la "morte cerebrale" e la morte dell'essere umano.

tuttavia, essere affermata in una duplice direzione: rilevando, da un lato, un'incoerenza per quanto attiene all'accertamento della morte cerebrale totale (Singer) e procedendo verso una connotazione utilitaristica dei trapianti. Dall'altro, è la morte medesima a non poter essere identificata; stando a questa premessa, si sostiene che il morire consiste di una processualità⁵² - della quale non è però possibile identificare la conclusione (Jonas).

Da parte nostra, ci sembra improponibile sostenere che non vi sia una relazione tra i trapianti e la morte cerebrale - non si può sostenere, detto altrimenti, che questa non sia stata deducibile per gli stessi trapianti. Tuttavia, il senso in cui intendiamo la dipendenza dei trapianti dalla morte cerebrale non è in linea né con la formulazione utilitaristica (per la quale la facilità con cui la morte cerebrale è stata accolta risiede nella sola volontà di effettuare i trapianti), né con quella - di matrice corticalista - che considera l'affermarsi della morte cerebrale come dipeso dal fatto che il cervello rappresenta la sede della personalità. Riteniamo, come detto poc'anzi, che sia innegabile il legame tra i trapianti e la morte cerebrale, ma che questo sia ancor più profondo rispetto alla posizione che scorge nella morte cerebrale nient'altro che una morte corticale mascherata. Inoltre, certamente la morte cerebrale ha rappresentato un grande vantaggio per la pratica dei trapianti; eppure - anche qui - vi è un aspetto ancor più radicale che bisogna mettere in luce. Vediamo meglio.

MORTE CEREBRALE E TRAPIANTI: LORO RELAZIONI CON LA MODERNITÀ FILOSOFICA

L'argomento che cerchiamo è di tipo filosofico: senza la separazione moderna dell'essere umano come composto di due realtà eterogenee - la *res cogitans* e la *res extensa* - la chirurgia dei trapianti non avrebbe intrapreso il corso che conosciamo, e neppure vi sarebbero state le premesse per gli stessi trapianti. Aver dato una lettura del corpo come "meccanismo" ha reso possibile una conoscenza del corpo - e, non lo si dimentichi, lo sviluppo di una capacità operativa su di esso - che, in altri universi culturali, non vi sono state. Si può dare, quindi, una lettura della stessa morte cerebrale in linea con il pensiero moderno, ma senza che con essa ci si riferisca - più o meno implicitamente guardando al peso conferito alla *res cogitans* - all'adesione al criterio di morte corticale (o della persona). Prendiamo, come punto di partenza, il "dualismo delle sostanze": la morte cerebrale è un degno frutto del

⁵² La tesi della distinzione tra la morte (come fenomeno istantaneo) ed il morire (come processo) è propria, del resto, tanto di Jonas (scelta etica) che di Shewmon (ontologica).

terreno della Modernità, in quanto essa fa propria una determinata concezione dei rapporti tra il cervello (luogo fisico che esprime la coscienza) ed il corpo. Si noti come, nella nostra interpretazione, sono le relazioni tra le sostanze a costituire l'argomento decisivo, mentre passa in secondo piano la considerazione della soggettività o del pensiero. Pensare al cervello come all'organo critico dell'integrazione corporea, non è altro, quindi, che attribuire - per definizione - al cervello delle funzioni di indirizzo su quella tipologia di meccanismo che corrisponde al corpo. Tutto ciò è eminentemente moderno: il criterio di morte cerebrale dev'essere, dopo l'analisi che abbiamo condotto, riconosciuto come un prodotto stesso del pensiero moderno - del dualismo che oppone ambiti tra loro irriducibili. Seguendo questa direzione, occorre, allora, rovesciare il rapporto tra morte cerebrale e morte corticale: generalmente, si è portati a far dipendere la prima dalla seconda - quando si afferma cioè che il criterio di morte cerebrale è stato scelto in virtù del fatto che nel cervello vi sono le caratteristiche più importanti per la persona. Come detto, occorre invertire i termini della questione - tralasciando, quindi, la soggettività, i tratti cruciali della personalità, ecc. - per restare, ancora, sul terreno del dualismo delle sostanze. Vediamo meglio: i criteri di morte altro non sono se non la chiarificazione di che cosa sia da intendere per *res cogitans* - dove centrale qui non è tanto, come detto poc'anzi, la componente di pensiero che la *res cogitans* esprime, quanto la sua capacità di indirizzare il corpo, o, riferendoci espressamente alla morte cerebrale, di tenerlo assieme.

Ecco che, per stendere una brevissima disamina dei criteri della morte dell'essere umano, la *res cogitans* viene, dapprima, intesa come l'intero cervello; ma tale definizione dev'essere abbandonata per l'impossibilità di accertare la cessazione di "tutte le funzioni" del cervello (Singer). Il passaggio successivo è, dunque, quello di collocare nel tronco encefalico (ora riconosciuto come il sistema critico del cervello) la *res cogitans*; e con ciò siamo arrivati al punto di non ritorno - ci si passi l'espressione - dei criteri di morte. La definizione di morte incentrata sul tronco cerebrale viene, dunque, meno, non perché vi siano delle incoerenze sul piano per es. concettuale, ma poiché sono gli stessi dati clinici a sancire che la funzione di controllo - di coordinazione del corpo - va cercata altrove che a livello dell'encefalo. La relazione tra cuore e cervello, infatti, non è più di dipendenza: le osservazioni mostrano che il cuore si trova, per così dire, in quella che può essere definita a pieno titolo come una posizione autonoma rispetto al cervello: "il cuore ha il suo pacemaker interno [...] che può battere perfettamente (sebbene non modulato nella frequenza) senza alcuna influenza dell'encefalo. I cuori

prelevati per i trapianti continuano a battere spontaneamente per qualche tempo anche fuori dal corpo.”⁵³

Al termine di questa carrellata sulle definizioni di morte, notiamo che la *res cogitans* ha assunto via via differenti connotazioni, fino a non poter più essere identificata soltanto nel cervello, per essere, quindi, fatta coincidere con la corporeità medesima. Con ciò, il cerchio si chiude.

I trapianti, quindi, sono l'epifenomeno, per così dire, della scienza moderna - la quale è tale, non lo si dimentichi, in virtù di un preciso orientamento che si è avuto nel campo del pensiero. Ma, dicendo che una posizione filosofica è efficace, non si sostiene ancora nulla quanto alla sua veridicità. I trapianti, infatti, hanno il precipuo significato nella medicina contemporanea, proprio in quanto poggiano, per quanto attiene al livello filosofico di indagine, su delle argomentazioni che sono false, le quali, inoltre, sono state sconfessate - e questo è lo snodo decisivo - proprio dallo stesso sviluppo dei trapianti. Ci riferiamo qui, ancora una volta, alle sopravvivenze in morte cerebrale, le quali hanno mostrato 1) che la separazione tra *res cogitans* e *res extensa* non ha motivo d'essere; in quanto 2) la *res extensa* mostra dei tratti che sono stati - erroneamente - ritenuti esclusivi della *res cogitans*. Portare a conclusione una gravidanza, oppure soltanto crescere, quando si è cerebralmente morti, fuoriesce dalle possibilità esercitabili - per definizione - dalla mera *res extensa*. Ecco che i trapianti rappresentano un paradosso per la filosofia: certamente, da un lato, essi sono il compimento del pensiero moderno - se considerati, come detto, quanto alla filosofia implicita che esprimono -, ma rappresentano, altresì, il superamento della Modernità filosofica - una volta che li si consideri sotto il segno di quanto la pratica (ovvero la casistica) ha da offrire alla filosofia medesima. Nella Modernità oltre la Modernità: così possiamo, quindi, esprimere il percorso dei trapianti d'organo

⁵³ D.A. Shewmon, “Disconnessione tra cervello e corpo”, cit., p. 296.

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