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**METAPHYSICAL FOUNDATIONS OF MORALITY**

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**BY FREDERIC KAMA-KAMA, TUTU**

**Reg. No.: C/50/7926/96**

**SUPERVISORS: Dr. SOLOMON MONYENYE**

**Dr. WALTER NABAKWE**

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# DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree at any other University.

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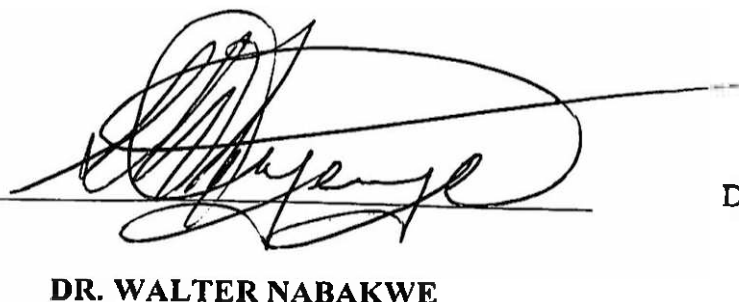
**FREDERIC KAMA-KAMA TUTU**

This thesis has been submitted for examination with our approval as University Supervisors.

Signature  \_\_\_\_\_

Date 17-4-2003

**DR. SOLOMON MONYENYE**

 Signature  \_\_\_\_\_

Date 17-4-2003

**DR. WALTER NABAKWE**

# **DEDICATION**

To my beloved father,  
the late *Etienne Kama-Kama*,  
who left this stumbling world of ours  
few days before the completion of this work.

Through his moral sense  
we, his offspring, have learnt to be,  
not only who we are, but also who we are yet to be.

May his soul rest in peace!

# **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

From its birth to its maturity, human consciousness is not an isolated enterprise. Thus, I take this opportunity to say my heartfelt thanks to all those who in a way or another have helped me reach this stage of my life.

First and foremost, I am grateful to The Almighty for the potentialities in me but also for all the challenges which have helped fashion my personality.

I have dedicated this work to the memory of my beloved father who, along with my mother, has been an inspiration source for our sense of humanity. It is God's wish that he should not witness our full maturity. I also view it as God's way of making us take full responsibility of our own destiny. Nevertheless, I also keep a pious thought for my mother, Sidonie Songer Zomina Kama-Kama, for her inexorable role in our upbringing. And to my brothers (the Kama-Kamas) and my sisters (the Efunus) my brotherly love. My gratitude goes also to my uncles Désiré Songer Dimpa and Matthieu Kizimi Aleley as well as to my nephews, nieces and cousins for their support. I have not forgotten my alter ego, Francisca Yeye Moseka, for her unconditional love and all the enthusiasm she brings in our vision of the future.

There are also friends who have stood by me. Some have even gone out of their plans to make significant financial contributions towards my expenses, especially with regard to the attendance to my father's funerals and the completion of my MA programme. Since most of them have requested anonymity, it would be fair not to mention any name at all. Nevertheless, I would like to thank them for their sense of abnegation. May they find here the expression of my heartfelt gratitude!

Last but not least, my special thanks go to Dr Solomon Monyenye, Dr Walter Nabakwe and Prof. Joseph Nyasani. Despite their busy schedules, the first two have accepted the supervision of this work. Prof. Nyasani has been helpful as a resource person. My gratitude to all of them is not only in that they have offered me constructive advice and criticisms; they have also been very supportive as I went through personal difficulties in the course of this work. This has also helped us to build up a personalistic relationship. However, I take full responsibility for the outcome of this work, since in final analysis they offered options but the decision has been mine.

# **ABSTRACT**

As the world makes progress in the consideration of humanity, with so many organizations to promote this nobility, there are also many setbacks in the spectrum of individual and/or collective action. Not necessarily that people are not aware of these shortcomings but that, consciously or unconsciously, people tend to rationalize their position on the basis of some agreed upon, at least tacitly, moral principles. The study tries to address the shortcomings of these moral principles by proposing a more reasonable moral theory.

The study itself is divided into five chapters. The first chapter defines the process, the opportunity, the scope and limitations of the entire work. Taking into account the fact that morality itself stirs a lot of suspicions with regard to its genuineness as an instance for the direction of human affairs the second chapter tries to set its foundation. It also shows how ethical theories are embedded in metaphysics which, contrary to what is generally thought of, is the foundational science. The third chapter goes on to verify the truthfulness of the most popularly acclaimed moral theories in order to determine which one of them provides the ultimate standard of morality. Led by the realization that none of these theories is exhaustive and that the difference amongst them is rather in term of their respective emphases, the fourth chapter tries a reconciliation of their general categories and proposes a personalistic morality. In turn, the fifth chapter shows the implications of this personalistic morality for our day-to-day life.

The leading idea is that, in whatever sphere of life one may be, one principle remains valid: either human action would conform to human dignity and thus promote both personal integrity and social cohesion or it would lose its very meaning and thus become a threat to our own race. We are then co-responsible of the destiny of our own humanity.

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# CHAPTER ONE:      **INTRODUCTION**

## **1. Background to the Study**

It would be conceded that our era has made a great and qualitative leap in the conception of the human being, with so many organizations (think of the numerous international bodies and other non-governmental organizations) to promote this “nobility”. In fact, from antiquity there has been an effort to understand the human being as both rational and social being. The existentialist input in this effort has been the consideration of these two dimensions in terms of freedom and likeness. Still, compared to previous eras, it is also in the course of our era that, along with numerous anonymous killings in the circuit of every day life, our world has witnessed the greatest number of mass killings. The reason behind such actions may be masked, but not unknown: acquisition of power or wealth, or even the acquisition of a misconceived freedom for individual and/or collective enjoyment of life. The question is whether there is any morality in such action.

It should be said that to some (including but not limited to the Sophists), morality itself is a mere luxury in this world. It is seen as the enemy of achievement and/or the last bastion of the failed. Nevertheless, to give credit to the proponents of the social contract theory, without necessarily fully agreeing with their position, experience has shown that life in a community would be unbearable, if not impossible, had not there been – at least implicitly – some agreed upon principles that regulate people’s conduct.

Thus, our task is to see which kind of moral principle is worth defending and why. The exercise itself is called for, not only with regard to dangers related to the advancement in science and technology, but also with regard to the general attitude towards the effect of one’s action.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

To start with, it should be said that in Ethics we are interested in human actions from the standpoint of good and bad. The trouble is that the diversity of tradition, circumstance and personality has given rise to various moral ideals. C. D. Broad's Five Types of Ethical Theory<sup>1</sup> may be considered a classical illustration of some of these moral ideals. The question is to determine which one of them should constitute the standard of morality and why.

In fact, in defining the standard of morality, all these moral ideals refer themselves to either an element inherent to the human being (reason, will, desire/intention, feeling/pleasure) or the end-result or consequence of the human action. In other words, there is somehow an agreement on the need to provide a standard for morality. Still, the trouble is that moral philosophers are unlikely to agree on a single element.

Now, considering that all these moral ideals have advantages as well as shortcomings, our task is to see whether these moral ideals are incompatible with one another or is there a possibility of reconciling them as to come up with a more comprehensive theory.

In short, some of the questions that arise whenever there is an attempt to inquire into the standard of morality are:

1. Are the various theories that tackle the problem of morality exhaustive or what are their limitations in their attempt to answer the moral question?
2. Are these theories mutually exclusive or is there a way of reconciling them as to come up with a more comprehensive moral theory?

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. C. D. BROAD, Five Types of Ethical Theory (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1930).

### **3. Research Goal and Objectives**

From what precedes, it should be said that this study subscribes itself to the ethical task of trying a reasoned and articulated treatise of human conduct. It aims at re-appraising the foundation and justifications of morality. And in the process, it attempts to realize two main objectives, namely:

1. To reconcile moral consequentialism and moral naturalism, and
2. To demonstrate the effect(s) of this reconciliation on day to day life.

### **4. Hypotheses**

The following are the assumptions we have come to confirm in this work.

1. Moral philosophers are generally in agreement on the need to provide a standard for morality but that conflicting moral ideals have come from the diversity of tradition and circumstance.
2. A more reasoned and articulated moral theory may be reached by reconciling the positions of these conflicting moral ideals.

### **5. Justification of the Study**

We have just defined this work as an ethical enterprise. In fact, it is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Masters of Arts degree in Philosophy. Nevertheless, notwithstanding our own philosophical limitations, it is also a philosophical reflection on the current state of affairs in the world.

The question may be why undertaking this task again while there is already a whole range of ethical works. But simply put, the answer is that, if they are to be overcome, social, political and economic problems depend in general on the attitudes people have towards their possible

solutions. Now, if this presupposition is granted, then this work is justified, at least in that with regard to our world's desperate need for peace and justice for all, we all need to undertake a fundamental reappraisal of our motives and actions.

At least, speaking of moral naturalism and moral consequentialism as the general categories of moral theory, it should be said that each of them offers but only part of the truth and at the same time is also lacking. If this analysis is right, then there is need to provide a more comprehensive moral theory. Still, the importance of this work is also in that it tries to elucidate the underpinnings of an adequate moral theory and its implications on day to day life. This should also be seen as a way to sensitize the human community to an adequate and responsible way of acting.

In this respect, the work is of particular importance for our mother land Africa as she is still looking for her identity in the midst of many civil and ethnic upheavals, and consequently increasing refugee problems. This situation is somehow peculiar to Africa in that she finds herself in a cross-road situation and that she is hesitating on which step to take. On the one hand, she seeks development based on the models of Western society while on the other hand she tries to hold fast onto her traditional culture. Perhaps, this would be a good syncretism. But, to agree with Archbishop Robert Sarah, while recognizing the grandeur of these models of Western society, it should also be said that they are very fragile and at times even ambiguous.<sup>2</sup> Besides, while recognizing African traditional culture as the basis for a true social and economic development in Africa, its limitations should also be pointed out, especially with regard to its difficulties in "*clearly perceiving the value, greatness and just autonomy of the human person*".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. R. SARAH, Culture, Democracy and Development (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2000), p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

However, the concern of this work goes further beyond Africa, to humanity as a whole. In fact, as particularly elaborated in the last section, it is our belief that the destiny of humanity depends upon our own actions. Only that the world, obsessed as it is with political power, technology and finance, advances upon a road inexorably stretching between glory and annihilation.<sup>4</sup> The latter seems even eminent especially with regard to the danger of nuclear arsenals – whose massive destructive power is only restrained by the efficiency of some world leaders' decision, a decision that is often taken at whim.

Besides, despite the mushrooming of religious movements, assault to individual and/or collective human life has become such a commodity. The irony, in fact, is that religion is supposed to re-establish the harmony with God, within humanity itself and with the environment. On the contrary, religion itself has quite often been at the origin of the spiral of violence: not only does the exaction of some, if not all, secret cults speak for itself; even the world largest religions are known to continue causing havoc in some parts of the world.

Along with assault to human life, is assault to environment. Here again, the populace of the south seems even more predisposed than that of the north. This is particularly due to her dependency for survival, almost exclusively on nature. The question is: how long can this dependency be sustained? In fact, there are cases where this populace of the south has no other alternative than to rely on nature. But isn't there a way to redistribute the world resources as to responsibly take care of the destiny of our humanity? And if so, on which basis could it be done?

These are some of the issues that arise when we take a critical look on the current state of affairs in the world. It should be said that there are many works on the danger facing our world, more particularly with regard to the danger facing our ecosystem. But to our knowledge, there are no

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. R. SARAH, *Op. Cit.*, p.10.

works that explicitly address this issue in connection with the moral question. At least, once this connection is granted, this work may also be seen as raising such awareness by providing not only information but existential challenge as well. The truth is that, with regard to the opportunity of this work, *"the challenge of Ethics consists rather in the stimulation of its questions than in the finality of its answers"*.<sup>5</sup>

## 6. Scope and Limitations

It is the aim of this work to try a reasoned and articulated treatise of human conduct. Reasoned and articulated in the sense that it would be theoretically instructive and practically helpful. Nevertheless, considering that the work itself is a library work, it would be difficult to justify the practicality of the moral principle defended here, since we cannot guarantee its application by everybody. At least, it is our belief that true change in the realm of human action starts with the mind. However, the present study confines itself within the limits of speculative knowledge. Its interest in whatever matter (say economics, politics, environment and religion or even psychology) is only insofar as the moral question is concerned.

## 7. Literature Review

To start with, it should be said that the moral question is as older as philosophy itself, at least in the sense that it began when people started reflecting on their existence and destiny as well as on the existence and destiny of the world around them. The truth is that there is a whole range of literatures on morality, going back even further than Greek antiquity, notably to Confucian tradition, which according to Jacques Maritain offers *"the most ancient and venerable forms of*

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<sup>5</sup> E.M. ALBERT, e.a., Great Traditions in Ethics (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, Co. 1969), p. 8.



*moral systematization*".<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, it is generally admitted that it is with Socrates that moral philosophy understood as systematic questioning and examination began.

Still, Socrates' moral concern is not much on which things make one's life good, but rather in what way should one live one's life. His contention is that happiness understood as the end of human action does not necessarily consist in things of the external world such as power, wealth and health. For him, it consists in goods that are proper to the essence of the human being. He also thinks that it is by ignorance that one becomes wicked and not because one wills evil, he sees knowledge as an important ingredient of morality. Thus, considering virtue is but craft knowledge, for him: "*above all else, a man must study, not how to seem good, but to be so, both in public and in private life*".<sup>7</sup>

However, Socrates' greatness is much in terms of the initiation of systematic questioning than in the decisiveness of his answer. At least, with regard to how one should live one's life, the task was left to Plato to show how the life of reason is the happiest and the best. And in this respect, Plato's contention is that, if it is possible for one to have pleasure and pain at the same time but not good and evil, it would be contradictory to identify good with pleasure and evil with pain.<sup>8</sup> At least, for him, it is by ignorance that the majority of the world takes pleasure as the highest good and, thus, pursues evil. As illustrated in his "allegory of the cave", he maintains that, unless one has the knowledge of the Good one cannot make it the object of one's pursuit. Accordingly, the Idea of the Good is the ultimate source of intelligibility and meaning, and thus, the ultimate source of morality. As he puts it:

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<sup>6</sup> J. MARITAIN, Moral Philosophy. An Historical and Critical Survey of the Great Systems (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), p.3.

<sup>7</sup> PLATO, Gorgias. 527.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. PLATO, Gorgias. 495 - 497.

In the world of knowledge, the last thing to be perceived and only with great difficulty is the essential Form of Goodness. Once it is perceived, the conclusion must follow that, of all things, this is the cause of whatever is right and good; in the visible world it gives birth to light and to the lord of light, while it is itself sovereign in the intelligible world and parent of intelligence and truth. Without having had a vision of this Form no one can act with wisdom, either in his own life or in matter of state.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, Aristotle considers the Idea of the Good too high an idea to be fully grasped by the human mind. In fact, the ideal of happiness, understood as the end of the human action, is the same as for Plato: it consists in rational contemplation.<sup>10</sup> Aristotle also recognizes the Idea of the Good as the principal ingredient of happiness and maintains that, *"not only is reason the best thing in us, but the objects of reason are the best of knowable objects"*.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, he also speaks of the attainment of happiness as the fulfillment of the human nature.<sup>12</sup> Only that with him, the term nature has another connotation. It is not a separate Idea/Essence outside the sensible world, but the very distinctive note of each species as found in its individual members. Accordingly, happiness pertains and becomes immanent in human life.<sup>13</sup> It should also be said that Aristotle agrees with his master that the ultimate end of human actions must be something self-sufficient, *"that which when isolated makes life desirable and lacking in nothing"*.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, he also considers that the one who is happy needs the external goods as well since, for him:

It is impossible, or not easy, to do noble acts without the proper equipment. In many actions we use friends and riches and political power as instruments; and there are some things the lack of which takes the lustre from happiness, as good birth, goodly children, beauty; for the man who is very ugly in appearance or ill-born or solitary and childless is not very likely to be happy,

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<sup>9</sup> PLATO, *Republic*, VII, 517.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Eudemian Ethics* I, 3, 1215 a 11 – 12.

<sup>11</sup> ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics* X, 1177 a 12.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, X, 1177 a 12 – 1178 a 8.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, I, 1099 a 31.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 1097 b 22.

and perhaps a man would be still less likely if he had thoroughly bad children or friends or had lost good children or friends by death.<sup>15</sup>

In fact, in his “good fortune theory” Aristotle sees a kind of superhuman element intervening in human affairs.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, happiness itself is seen as the result of individual relentless striving.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, virtue is a state of character concerned with choice lying in means relative to the agent<sup>18</sup> and the perfect and happiest life is not only the most beautiful and the best of things; it is also that which brings the greatest pleasure.<sup>19</sup>

The Stoics and Epicureans also share the same ideal of happiness. Nevertheless, they are concerned with immediate effectiveness. At least, both Stoicism and Epicureanism consider that disturbances come as results of vain and unbridled desires whereas if one follows nature, one would be in peace with oneself and with the universal course of things. By “nature” here is meant the intelligible and rational influx hidden beneath sensible appearances, which at the same time governs the universe, and not empirical facts. At least, for Epictetus who is said to have helped perpetrate the stoic doctrine,<sup>20</sup> although not much by writing than by teaching:

All things serve and obey the (laws of the) universe; the earth, the sea, the sun, the stars, and the plants and animals of the earth. Our body likewise obeys the same in being sick and well, young and old and passing through the other changes decreed. It is therefore reasonable that what depends on ourselves, that is, our understanding, should not be the only rebel. For the universe is powerful and superior, and consults the best for us by governing us in conjunction with the whole. And further; opposition, besides that it is unreasonable, and produces nothing except a vain struggle, throws us into pain and sorrows.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> ARISTOTLE, Nichomachean Ethics I, 1099 a 31 – b 6.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. ARISTOTLE, Eudemian Ethics, VII, 14, 1248 a 26 – 29.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. ARISTOTLE, Nichomachean Ethics, I, 3, 1212 a 13 – 19.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. ibid., II, 1106 b 36 – 1107 a 26.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. ARISTOTLE, Eudemian Ethics, I, 1, 1214 a 8 – 9.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. D. COMPOSTA, History of Ancient Philosophy (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1990), pp. 322-324.

<sup>21</sup> EPICTETUS, Discourses, Bk. I, Ch. XVIII.

This echoes Epicurus' injunction that we should not violate nature but obey her.<sup>22</sup> Still, both Stoicism and Epicureanism advocate reasonable actions as a way of avoiding frustration and disappointment. In turn, as presented in the prudent man of Epicurus and the moderate man of Epictetus, virtue consists in the conformity with reason and with oneself.

For Epicurus, the prudent man is not only the one who understands that the limit of good things is easy to attain whereas the course of ills is either short in time or slight in pain, but also the one who thinks it better to be unfortunate in reasonable action than to prosper in unreason. Accordingly, *"it is better in a man's actions that what is well chosen should fail, rather than what is ill chosen should be successful owing to change"*.<sup>23</sup>

In the same sense Epictetus considers that where there is need to pursue or avoid anything, this should be done with moderation. As he puts it:

If you desire any of the things not within our own power, you must necessarily be disappointed; and you are not yet secure of those which are within our power, and so are legitimate objects of desire. Where it is practically necessary for you to pursue or avoid anything, do even this with discretion, and gentleness, and moderation.<sup>24</sup>

The main difference between the two schools lies in that while for Stoicism, in final analysis, it is value which is the standard of morality, for Epicureanism it is pleasure. In fact, for the Stoics, it is the right will which makes use of other faculties, whether great or small. Thus:

If it be set right, a bad man becomes good; if it be wrong, a good man becomes wicked... In a word, it is this which neglected, forms unhappiness; and, well cultivated, happiness.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. EPICURUS, Fragment. XXI.

<sup>23</sup> EPICURUS, Letter to Menoecus, 133 – 135.

<sup>24</sup> EPICTETUS, Enchiridion. I, II.

<sup>25</sup> EPICTETUS, Discourses. Bk. II, Ch. XXII.

Nevertheless, they also consider that the will can tend to something only when it is perceived as value. On the other hand, the Epicureans consider pleasure as the beginning and the end of the blessed life. As Epicurus puts it:

For it is to obtain this end that we always act, namely to avoid pain and fear. And when this is once secured for us, all the tempest of the soul is dispersed, since the living creature has not to wander as though in search of something that is missing, and to look for some other thing by which he can fulfill the good of the soul and the good of the body. For it is then that we have need of pleasure, when we feel pain owing to the absence of pleasure; but when we do not feel pain, we no longer need pleasure. And for this cause we can call pleasure the beginning and the end of the blessed life. For we recognize pleasure as the first good innate in us, and from pleasure we begin every act of choice and avoidance, and to pleasure we return again, using the feeling as the standard by which we judge every good.<sup>26</sup>

However, Christian morality favours Stoicism to Epicureanism. Only that, for Christian morality, at least as definitely shaped in the writings of Augustine and Aquinas, true happiness is not now enjoyed. What is now enjoyed is but a reflection of the heavenly happiness. As Augustine puts it:

The true blessings of the soul are not now enjoyed; for that is no true wisdom which does not direct all its prudent observations, manly actions, virtuous self-restraint, and just arrangements, to that end in which God shall be all and all in a secure eternity and perfect peace.<sup>27</sup>

According to Aquinas, both humanity and the planet she lives in are far from being perfect. Thus, "*besides the natural and the human law, it was necessary for the directing of the human conduct to have a Divine law*".<sup>28</sup> Morality is then related to the will of God and the moral person is the one who lives by faith although referring himself to Tully's rhetoric, Aquinas also considers that:

In the act we must take note of who did it, by what aids or instruments he did it, what he did, where he did it, why he did it, how and when he did it.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> EPICURUS, *Letter to Menoeceus*, 128

<sup>27</sup> AUGUSTINE, *The City of God*, Bk. XIX:20 in E.M. ALBERT, e.a., *Op. Cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>28</sup> T. AQUINAS, *Summa Theological*, I – II, 7, 3.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* I-II, 7,3.

For Hobbes, since human behaviour is chiefly determined by the individual's desires and aversions, desires and aversions should also be the basis for evaluating human actions. As he puts it:

Whatsoever is the object of any man's appetite or desire, that is it which he for his part calleth good; and the object of his hate and aversion, evil; and of his contempt, vile and inconsiderable. For these words of good, evil, and contemptible are ever used with relation to the person that useth them; there being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any common rule of good and evil, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves.<sup>30</sup>

But considering that the human being is, by nature, completely and exclusively egoistic, Hobbes sees the social contract as a prerequisite for morality. The contract itself is defined in terms of a covenant whereby individuals surrender their rights to the representative government.

A commonwealth is said to be instituted when a multitude of men do agree, and covenant, everyone with everyone, that to whatsoever man, or assembly of men, shall be given by the major part, the right to present the person of them all, that is to say, to be their representative.<sup>31</sup>

Accordingly, the measure of good and evil action is but the civil law; and the judge the legislator, who is but the representative of the commonwealth. Now, considering that the human being is egoistic by nature, Hobbes considers absolute civil power as the only guarantee for morality.

In contrast, Kant considers reason as the sole authority for the moral agent. Accordingly, he considers that the supreme principle of morality must be a categorical imperative. By the latter is meant a command of reason insofar as it is obligatory for the will.<sup>32</sup> Free-will is, thus, set as a prerequisite for morality.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> HOBBS, Leviathan in E. M. ALBERT, e.a., Op. Cit., p. 139.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 136-137.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. I. KANT, Fundamental Principles in T. K. ABBOTT, tr., Kant's Critique of Practical Reason and Other Works on the Theory of Ethics (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1898), p. 16.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Ibid., pp. 9, 46 – 47.

The categorical imperative itself is expressed in several forms with each one of them expressed in quite different terms whereby Kant tries to stress different aspects of morality. However, the bottom line is that, for him, action has moral worth only if carried out from motives of duty, regardless of its implications.

Utilitarians, on the other hand, consider utility as "*the test of right and wrong*".<sup>34</sup> Utility itself is defined in terms of happiness which, in turn, is identified with pleasure. As J. S. Mill puts it:

The creed which accepts as foundation of morals Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By "Happiness" is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by 'unhappiness', pain, and the privation of pleasure.<sup>35</sup>

Mill maintains that this theory is grounded on the very theory of life according to which pleasure and freedom from pain are the only things desirable as ends.<sup>36</sup> Still, by greatest happiness he does consider the agent's own, but the happiness of all concerned. As he makes sure to clarify:

I have dwelt on this point as being a necessary part of a perfectly just rule of human conduct. But it is by no means an indispensable condition to the acceptance of the utilitarian standard; for that standard is not the agent's own greatest happiness, but the greatest amount of happiness altogether.<sup>37</sup>

In contrast to Hobbes, Mill defends the utilitarian principle on the basis of social feeling which, for him, is not only natural to the human being but also constitutes the strength of the utilitarian morality.<sup>38</sup> He also considers that no reason can be given, with regard to why the general happiness is desire, except the fact that each person desires his own happiness.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> J.S. MILL, Utilitarianism (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1897), p. 8.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 53.

In turn, existentialist thinkers base their morality on freedom as the condition of human existence. At least, for Jean Paul Sartre:

If existence really does not precede essence, there is no explaining away by reference to a fixed and given human nature. In other words, there is no determinism, man is free, man is freedom. On the other hand, if God does not exist, we find no values or commands to turn to which legitimize our conduct. So in the bright realm of values, we have no excuse behind us, nor justification before us. We are alone, with no excuses.<sup>40</sup>

Human freedom is also said to manifest itself in creative endeavours which, according to Sartre, are also the way of realizing oneself or, as he would put it, the way of realizing the meaning of the world of one's essence.<sup>41</sup>

In contrast to both Hobbes and Mill, the standard for good or bad is now left to the judgement of the individual.<sup>42</sup> And individual autonomy is set as the prerequisite for the creation of a human community. As Sartre himself puts it:

To say that we invent values means nothing else but this: life has no meaning a priori. Before you come alive, life is nothing; it is up to you to give it a meaning, and value is nothing else but the meaning that you choose. In this way, you see, there is a possibility of creating a human community.<sup>43</sup>

However, it is with the principle of autonomy that Sartre sees the only possibility of passing moral judgement.<sup>44</sup> At least, he agrees with Kant that freedom desires both itself and the freedom of others. But he also considers that principles which are too abstract, such as the categorical imperative, run aground in trying to decide action.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> J. P. SARTRE, Existentialism (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957), p. 27.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. J. P. SARTRE, Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 39.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. J. P. SARTRE, Existentialism and Human Emotions (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957), p. 28.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 456.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 17.



We may go on to mention other moral positions. But these are the most popularly acclaimed positions we shall consider in our analysis of the moral question.

## 8. Theoretical Framework

Again, it is the aim of this work to try a reasoned and articulated treatise of human conduct. The idea is to provide a more comprehensive moral principle, in the sense that it would foster both personal integrity and social cohesion, and give an inclusive account of the course of the action.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that we intend to come up with an essentially new moral theory. To agree with Immanuel Kant, it would be silly to claim to have discovered such a principle as something really new, as if the world before were ignorant, or had been in thoroughgoing error.<sup>46</sup> At least, we subscribe to the big circle of existentialist morality, a choice which may be justified by our belief in the transcendence of the human being. Thus, with regard to the moral theory defended here, we shall also proceed from the starting point of existentialism, namely that the human being *"is what he makes of himself through his action upon the situation"*.<sup>47</sup> Karol Wojtyla goes even further to say: *"morality has no real existence apart from human acting, apart from action"*.<sup>48</sup>

Still, according to existentialism, action has moral import only when it implies knowledge and freedom. The reference to these two notions is particularly to imply responsibility for one's actions. It remains to say how freedom may constitute the basis for an ethics since freedom itself is often misconceived.

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. I. KANT, The Metaphysical Principles of Virtue. Part II of The Metaphysics of Morals (translated by James Ellington with an Introduction by Warner Wick, New York: The Bobbs-Merrill, Inc., 1964), p. xiv.

<sup>47</sup> C. ANDERSON, The Foundation of Sartrean Ethics (The Regents Press of Kansas, 1979), p. 43.

<sup>48</sup> K. WOJTYLA, The Acting Person (Dordrech: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1979), p. 70.

In fact, it is generally admitted that existentialism bases its morality on what is relative, subjective and unpredictable. At least, it is in detachment to such a position that we rely on Kant's moral theory. Still, this is not much in the sense that Kant's moral theory provides the supreme moral principle, but in the sense that it sets the foundation for the transition from the integrity of the agent to the universalizability of morality. We shall, thus, rely on the third formulation of Kant's categorical imperative in our attempt to provide a moral principle which includes the ethical demands of both personal integrity and social cohesion.

## 9. Methodology

It has been already mentioned that this study is mainly a library work. In other words, we shall be dealing with second hand data/information. This is not only with regard to the nature of the question the study tries to address, but also with regard to the nature of philosophical thinking itself. At the least, according to Karol Wojtyla, philosophical thinking is not only a thinking "*nourished by, and based upon, history*" but also a thinking in which "*to 'philosophize' often means to reflect upon theories about theories*".<sup>49</sup>

Thus, the collection of data focused on the tenets of the various moral theories. These tenets have been subjected to the philosophical evaluation according to an analytical and critical method. The method implies the exposition of the views on the issues at stake, followed by a critical appraisal of the same. The criterion for this appraisal is the implication of these views for both (we insist on both) personal integrity and social cohesion.

It should also be said that the analysis and critique of these views have been foremost guided by the knowledge of logic. This is important in order to point out their loopholes as well as to draw

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<sup>49</sup> K. WOJTYLA, *Op. Cit.*, p. vii.

conclusions on foregoing discussions. Nevertheless, comparison has been also used to see whether these views or moral theories are mutually exclusive or is there a possibility of reconciling their positions. Reference to previous studies has been helpful in spelling out the circumstances of the development of these theories and in reconciling their respective positions. The product of this reconciliation has been tested according to its implications for both personal integrity and social cohesion.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE ESSENCE OF MORALITY

### Introduction

From the outset, we have defined our enterprise as an ethical one. According to John Hospers, ethics may be simply defined as the justification of the norms of morality.<sup>50</sup> This assertion is often made and as a rule is accepted without reservation. Nevertheless, it is the aim of this chapter to try to elucidate what is implied by morality. To do so, we shall first present some conceptions of morality. These conceptions will be followed by the position defended in this work. Since the essence of morality is best defined in metaphysical terms, we shall also consider the implications of such a conception for ethics. Now, considering that metaphysics itself stirs a lot of suspicions with regard to its genuineness as a mode of knowledge, how the justification of morality is done in ethics will be preceded by an elucidation of our understanding of metaphysics. Let us start by the consideration of the phenomenon of morality.

### 1. Some conceptions of morality

#### a. Morality as an illusion

It would be conceded that the term "morality" is not a neologism. Yet, there are people who deny all moral categories entirely. This position is generally known as ethical nihilism.

Perhaps, this denial is due to the fact that the expression "moral" itself is ambiguous. Not only does it have two opposites, "immoral" and "nonmoral"; it also has different uses.

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. J. HOSPERS, Human Conduct (Shorter Edition. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1972), pp. 4-10.

We distinguish moral from immoral behaviour and moral from nonmoral questions, issues, controversies, problems. (The word 'amoral' has still a different use. People not issues, are described as amoral. A person is said to be amoral when he has no sense of right and wrong, or acts as if he didn't).<sup>51</sup>

Still, whatever the use or implication of moral categories, to say that they do not even exist is particularly mistaken. In fact, Hospers agrees in the main that there is a great deal of controversy about the meaning of ethical terms. Nevertheless, he refuses to accept that they mean nothing.

When we say, 'Murder is wrong', it is not as if we were uttering nonsense syllables such as 'Murder is glubglub'. Even a small child attaches some meaning to the word and would never interchange the words 'right' and 'wrong' in a sentence. For that matter, neither would he use 'wrong' synonymously with other words such as 'book' and 'red'. Something is meant by moral words; so whatever this may be, the words are not meaningless.<sup>52</sup>

It is, thus, up to the ethical nihilism to show on which account it denies moral categories. In any case, morality is an undeniable human phenomenon. Even ethical skepticism is well in agreement with this position although it considers that nobody is justified in holding any position whatsoever.

It seems that there is nothing decisive we can say against scepticism unless we first ask it whether it has any justification by holding its own position. In other words, by denying others any justification to hold a view, at once the sceptic denies his/her own ability to hold any view. However, history is witness to the fact that, although conflicting moral ideals disagree on the ultimate standard of morality, they do agree in the main with common sense that moral standards, such as virtue, happiness, good, right and duty, pertain to what is intelligible as a realm of human experience. At least according to William Augustus Banner, these theories are an effort to express, in however confused a fashion, what is indicated in the moral experience of the individual. As he puts it:

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<sup>51</sup> J. HOSPERS, *Op. Cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

The theories of the moral life ...have individually something to say about man as a creature of moral sensibility (viz., a creature who claims the good and rejects the bad), and something about the order of good things.<sup>53</sup>

## **b. Morality as the last bastion of the failed**

Closer to ethical scepticism is the conception of morality as the last bastion of the failed. This is, in fact, an expression taken from Hostile Witness, a novel by William Lashner. The point is that it portrays the view of a large number of people (especially in politics and business arena) for whom, "*Morality is a mere luxury in this world...It is the enemy of achievement, the last bastion of the failed*".<sup>54</sup> Lashner makes Prescott, the character advocating this position, say that one should first learn this view in order to be able to learn what it is to be successful in life.

It looks as if succeeding in one's undertakings were in opposition or contradiction with being morally enlightened. Still, we need not dismiss this position without a hearing. At least, it seems to be supported by our sometimes, if not often, double moral standard. We are usually fond of criticising the moral failure of others whereas, when put in the same situation, we end up hanging our ethics along with our coat outside the very same door as those we are fond of criticising.<sup>55</sup> This way, morality seems nothing but a trick to present the bill to others. However, this is still the recognition of morality as a human phenomenon. Or, to agree with Jacques Maritain, "*if one believes that man is only an evolved monkey; one has then the materialistic ethic of the struggle for life*".<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> W.A. BANNER, Ethics: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), p. 153.

<sup>54</sup> W. LASHNER, Hostile Witness (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1995), p. 539.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. ibid., p. 553.

<sup>56</sup> J. MARITAIN. Moral Philosophy... p. 449.

### c. Morality as an instrument of oppression

This view is also closer to ethical scepticism although at once the contrary of the conception of morality as the last bastion of the failed. In fact, this is the view held by the so-called Marxist ethic, an ethic that finds its audience mostly amongst the poor who view themselves as the oppressed and/or exploited class. But the opposite of the remark we have just made against the conception of morality as the last bastion of the failed, namely, that being morally enlightened is in opposition or in contradiction with being rich or succeeding in one's undertakings, is also false. At least, Jacques Maritain is critical of both positions when he says:

If one fancies that all that is not economic factor is only an epiphenomenal superstructure; one moves then towards a materialist ethic – either towards a materialist ethic suspended from the myth of technocracy organizing human life on the basis of pure productivity; or towards a materialist ethic such as the Marxist ethic, suspended from the myth of revolution and from that of the self-creation of man manifested by the titanic struggle of the working class freeing itself through violence from a condition presumed to be irremediably servile, and by the final coming of a universal communist society.<sup>57</sup>

### d. Morality as fundamentally varying with the individual and/or the group

Another conception closer to ethical scepticism is that of the Sophists (and their modern defenders) for whom, to use the formulation of Lavine, "*moral concepts vary fundamentally with culture, history, or individual person and that a universal or absolute ethics is impossible*".<sup>58</sup>

This position, which is in fact subsequent of cultural relativism, is generally referred to as ethical relativism. It may be important to say that this position is appealing, not only for its tolerance of any kind of society, but also for not being 'judgmental' of other groups of people. Nevertheless, there are obvious drawbacks to both cultural and ethical relativism. At least for Lavine:

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<sup>57</sup> J. MARITAIN, *Moral Philosophy...*, p. 450.

<sup>58</sup> T.Z. LAVINE, *From Socrates to Sartre: The Philosophical Quest* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989), p. 45.

The principal drawback was dramatically exposed, 'writ large', as Plato would say, when the cultural and ethical relativists of the United States had to face the rise of Nazi Germany and the hideous cruelties of its work camps and extermination camps in which millions of human beings were tortured and murdered.<sup>59</sup>

True, each culture evolves in its own way, so to speak, with its own standards and values. But to deny the possibility of universal and objective ethical standards would mean to deny our moral responsibility to judge any would be right or wrong doing. It would also mean to deny any shared values within humanity. At least, as it is reported of Socrates, by the way contemporary to the Sophists, making the point:

If human beings didn't have certain feelings in common (though they may vary a bit from man to man), if each of us had merely his own private sensation unshared by the rest, it would not be easy to demonstrate to another what one feels".<sup>60</sup>

It should be added that morality is not merely a matter of feelings but also and foremost of the implication of one's action.

#### **e. Morality as conformity to prevailing mores**

According to Freudian moralists, morality is but conformity to prevailing mores. With regard to the appraisal of this position, also known as ethical conformism, the first attempt would be to try to determine the extent to which these mores are prevailing: whether it is only on a particular group/society or within the whole of humanity. If the answer is the former, then, we should also consider the following question: what about when the prevailing mores in a particular group/society are in opposition or in contradiction to those in another group/society? In other words, could both sets of principles be right?

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<sup>59</sup> T.Z. LAVINE, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 45-46.

<sup>60</sup> PLATO, *Gorgias* 481



Obviously for ethical relativism the answer would be yes, since it considers that there is no overall standard of right and wrong – what is right and what is wrong depends on the group/society of which one is member. This way, slavery, for example, might be right or wrong according to the group/society in which one is a member, and not per se. But note that there is already an ambiguity and Lavine's remark on the drawbacks of cultural relativism also applies here.

Let us consider the other alternative, namely, that these mores are prevailing within the whole of humanity. The question to be asked in this connection is that of what makes them right: is it because they are ancient or because they pertain to the majority? In either case, there is also a fallacy here. The consideration of slavery will again help us illustrate the inconsistency of this argument that age or time should constitute the criterion of morality.

In fact, from ancient Egypt through ancient Greece, ancient Babylon and ancient Roma, up to its recent official abolition (although it is still practised in some parts of the world, under one form or another), slavery was part of the accepted mores. Nevertheless, this has not made slavery right; the Durban United Nations' conference on racism heard many voices claiming reparation for the transatlantic slave trade. Thus, it would be ambiguous to say that in the past slavery was good but that it is evil nowadays.

The criticism stands also against the argument that the view of the majority should constitute the criterion of morality. To say the least, this is such a strange conclusion. In fact, one wonders whether a majority cannot be mistaken. At least, to agree with John Hospers:

A minority view may sometimes spread and become a majority view later; in that event, was the act wrong before and right now? ... If what the majority of

a society or group approves is ipso facto right in that society, how can there be any such thing as moral improvement?<sup>61</sup>

To consider our own situation, this question is also of particular importance for African traditional morality, in that, let aside the academic discussions on its very existence, it may be defined as a social conformist morality relying on the tradition of the elders. The question is whether this elders' tradition is right simply because it is ancient or because it embodies a criterion valid in its own right. At least for Masolo:

If the answer to this question is the former, then the traditionalist has to explain why age or time itself should constitute a criterion of morality, and if the latter then the said criterion must be spelt out and clearly formulated and its merit or validity examined.<sup>62</sup>

We shall consider other views on morality under the following heading. A common characteristic with the five conceptions we have just presented is that they reduce morality to *"nothing more than an expression of the interests, feelings, or attitudes of approval and disapproval of the individuals in a given society or epoch"*.<sup>63</sup> At least, there are authors who consider morality as unravelling the nature of the human being.

## 2. Morality as unravelling the nature of the human being

To start with, morality is related to the human being, not much as a possible being, but as always a being in situation, the *"zein"* of Heidegger. Situation here may be defined as *"the meeting of structures and conditionings dependent upon material causality"*.<sup>64</sup> But it should be added that the human being never accepts purely and simply the structures and conditions of his situation.

At least, to agree with Maritain:

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<sup>61</sup> J. HOSPERS, *Op. Cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>62</sup> A. O. MASOLO, *Introductory Ethics* (Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya Ltd., 1988), p. 5.

<sup>63</sup> W.A. BANNER, *Op. Cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>64</sup> J. MARITAIN, *Moral Philosophy*, p. 450.

It would be a betrayal of human nature not to recognize the demands, which are consubstantial to it, of the superhuman in man, and this nature's need of the progressive movement of the spirit, with its torments and its dangers, in other words, its need of perpetually going beyond the presently given moment of our condition on earth. And if we want to go beyond it, it is because of that extent we do not accept it without reserve.<sup>65</sup>

In metaphysics, this capacity of going beyond the structures and conditions of the human situation is referred to as transcendence. This is not much in the sense of a physical movement, but rather as "*a creative effort to break through the meaning of existence*".<sup>66</sup> The point is that it is precisely this search for the meaning of existence and its valuation which characterizes the human being as a being of moral sensibility. Not much that the human condition necessarily conforms to the law of the moral order but that, as well noted by Régis Jolivet:

Always and everywhere men have admitted, at any rate implicitly, the existence of moral values as something distinct from material values and have recognized themselves to be subject to moral laws setting forth an ideal of conduct and imposing the duty or the obligation of realizing in their lives, both individual and social, those values which merit unqualified respect – to the point indeed of its never having seemed possible to them to repudiate the demands of morality without at the same time repudiating their own humanity.<sup>67</sup>

At least, it is in this valuation process that one sets forth an ideal of life and imposes to oneself the duty of realizing it in one's own life. This process, also referred to as the process of self-determination or self-affirmation, is also an argument against determinism, particularly in the sense that it is an experience in discrimination or the viewing of some situation as more or less acceptable than some other manner of existence. William Augustus Banner goes even further to say that in this respect every individual is moral. But this is to be admitted only insofar as, to use his own formulation, "*morality is first an awareness or consciousness of the range of possibility*

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<sup>65</sup> J. MARITAIN, *Moral Philosophy*, p. 455.

<sup>66</sup> N. BERDYAEV, *The destiny of Man* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1960), p. 5.

<sup>67</sup> R. JOLIVET, *Man and Metaphysics* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1961), p. 116.

*in human existence, as an experience of reflection and self-examination*”.<sup>68</sup> Otherwise, as Banner would agree with Karol Wojtyla, morality has no existence apart from one’s performance of actions and one’s fulfillment through them. At least for Karol Wojtyla, not only is this fulfillment equivalent to the implementation of self-governance and self-possession as the result of self-determination; *“it is only in such a dynamic cycle that morality can be concretized in the actual performance of action, as, so to speak, into an ‘actual reality’*”.<sup>69</sup>

Definitely, morality is related to human action, an expression in which the adjective “human” implies the possibility of doing otherwise than one actually does. Or, to use another formulation of Karol Wojtyla, it implies *“a specific type and line of becoming that is most intrinsically related to his nature, that is, his humanness, and to the fact of his being a person*”.<sup>70</sup>

At least, it is in this sense that we speak of morality as unravelling the nature of the human being. More particularly in that, as an awareness or consciousness, it is also a normative ordering in terms of perceived meanings, values, purposes and goals of human existence with regard to the ways in which one can choose to relate oneself to reality.<sup>71</sup> Or as Immanuel Kant puts it, *“if there is to be responsible action with respect to means, it must be through the initiative of the individual in imposing consistency of volition upon himself”*.<sup>72</sup>

The idea of choice is not only as to imply freedom which, in turn, entails responsibility for one’s actions; it is also as to imply that, in its axiological nature, morality itself means the division, or even the contraposition of good and evil. And it is precisely from this point of view – namely, of

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<sup>68</sup> W. A. BANNER, *Op. Cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>69</sup> K. WOJTYLA, *Op. Cit.*, p. 152.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. L. MAGESA, *African Religion. The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998), pp. 13-14 (note 2).

<sup>72</sup> In W. A. BANNER, *Op. Cit.*, p. 112.

a specific differentiation of values, with respect to the human being as a transcendent being – that morality is studied in philosophy and presupposed in ethics.

### 3. Metaphysics as providing the basis for morality

To consider morality as unravelling the nature of the human being is also to say that it presupposes metaphysics. Only that metaphysics itself stirs a lot of suspicions with regard to its genuineness as a mode of inquiry. At least for Régis Jolivet:

Metaphysics in particular has met with objections which cast doubt upon its genuineness as a mode of knowledge. It is not enough therefore to maintain that differing modes of knowledge have always co-existed, or that August Comte, who dismissed all metaphysics as bogus, was actually one of the great metaphysicians of his century. The problem must be approached on the speculative level, where the arguments of philosophers have placed it.<sup>73</sup>

Nevertheless, we shall limit ourselves to the conception of metaphysics as the foundational science. This echoes René Descartes' representation of particular sciences as the branches of a tree growing on the roots of metaphysics. The idea behind this symbolism is not only that metaphysics is concerned with things beyond sense-experience – indeed a tree's roots buried under the ground are hardly noticed – but also that the other sciences are nurtured by metaphysics as the science which defines, judges and defends their postulates.<sup>74</sup>

Still, the importance of metaphysics for morality is not much in its being a science but foremost in the orientation of human living, more particularly in the sense that, pertaining to the very essence of the human being as a rational being, metaphysics is a continual search for meaning.

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<sup>73</sup> R. JOLIVET, Man and Metaphysics (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1961), p. 9.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. W. A. WALLACE, The Elements of Philosophy: A Compendium for Philosophers and Theologians (New York: Alba House, 1977), p. 85.

Speaking of metaphysics as pertaining to the very nature of the human being as a rational being, this could be seen even in a small child. So soon as reason awakes to the power of speculation, the child continually wonders at the world around it. At a later stage, this wonder culminates at the essence of things, including (but not limited to) one's own existence. Régis Jolivet is even keener in saying: "*man practices metaphysics just as he breathes without thinking about it*".<sup>75</sup> But this can be true only insofar as it refers to the human being as the only animal that wonders about the meaning of its existence as well as about the existence of the world around it. Otherwise, as a philosophical discipline, metaphysics is a systematic reflection. At least, it is in this sense that Richard Taylor thinks that nothing could be sillier than to say that everyone has metaphysical views. The point is that, as Taylor puts it, "*to think metaphysically is to think, without arbitrariness and dogmatism, on the most basic problems of existence*".<sup>76</sup>

However, it is particularly in the sense that one's way of life is closely related to the very meaning one gives to life that we consider metaphysics as providing, at its own level, the basis for morality. Implied here is also the whollistic and systematic nature of metaphysics. Insofar as it embodies and elicits everything, it supplies morality with the rational foundation for its establishment.<sup>77</sup> It remains to define the relationship between ethics and morality.

#### **4. Ethics as providing the justification of morality**

To consider ethics as providing the justification of morality is also to say that ethics and morality are not one and the same thing. Still, the difference is not only in that morality is generally considered the material object of ethics; it is also with regard to their respective nature.

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<sup>75</sup> R. JOLIVET, *Op. Cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>76</sup> R. TAYLOR, *Metaphysics* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 1.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. R. JOLIVET, *Op. Cit.*, p. 137.

In fact, we have just viewed morality as a human phenomenon, that is, as consciousness by which one acts in self-determination or self-affirmation. This is also to say that moral consciousness is distinct from psychological consciousness or the bare apprehension of interior facts. It is the process of valuation or conscience *"by which one acts not merely as a witness but as a legislator and judge whose task it is to decide what ought to be done here and now"*.<sup>78</sup>

The point is that, while morality may be considered a discourse of the second degree, ethics as a philosophical discipline is a discourse of the third degree. This is particularly in that it does *"not merely describe moral ideals held by human beings but also asks which ideal is better than others, more worth pursuing, and why"*.<sup>79</sup>

This is also the core difference between ethics and the empirical sciences such as anthropology, psychology and sociology, which are also interested in morals. It may be important to say that findings of these sciences about people's moral beliefs and/or behavior are of interest to ethics. But while these empirical sciences are merely descriptive, ethics is also prescriptive. Banner goes even further to compare it with the science of medicine. Still, apart from their common pursuit of human well-being, the analogy is also to underline what is indeterminate in human existence itself, namely, freedom.<sup>80</sup> Now, considering that materials of moral analysis are as variable as the expressions of moral estimation and the modes of activity, feeling and action,

Banner notes that:

Ethics as a science must be expected to offer principles or norms, concerning what is good and right, and derivative criteria, concerning the use of 'good' and 'right' which govern truth and error in moral judgment with respect both to what has occurred and to what is projected in deliberate human behavior.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> R. JOLIVET, *Op. Cit.*, p. 116.

<sup>79</sup> J. HOSPERS, *Op. Cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. W. A. BANNER, *Op. Cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

The point is that it is also in this sense that we consider that it is the proper field and function of ethics to evaluate a way of life in terms of what is good or bad on the basis of certain principles.

Speaking of ethics as a prescriptive science, it may be important to say that it is this view that has led to the conception of ethics as the study of what ought to be as opposed to what is. Only that this is such a misleading statement. First of all, the term “ought” is itself ambiguous: it does not have the same meaning in expressions such as “ought to be” and “ought to do” although we might consider that “X ought to exist” means the same as “someone ought to do or bring about X”. Secondly, the study of what is right or wrong is very well the study of what is.

Perhaps, we should consider that such a conception has the advantage of underlying the prescriptive nature of ethics as opposed to a mere theory of right. At least for John Hospers:

When we say that it is right to do something, we usually mean no more than that it is permissible – in other words, that it is not wrong to do it. But when we say that you ought to do it, or have a duty or an obligation to do it, we are saying something more: that it is wrong not to do it.<sup>82</sup>

The problem is that to prescribe rules for every human action would require, not only knowledge of sound moral principle(s), but also knowledge of a vast array of empirical facts about every agent: the circumstances as well as the probable effects of the action. But we know only too well that no human being is capable of such knowledge. At least, ethics does not provide an answer to every moral question. Since every situation is somewhat different from every other, all that an ethical theory can tell us in this respect is that acts of a certain kind are right and that those of another kind are wrong. It is thus left to the agent to, so to speak, ethically “baptise” his action by his ethical choice. Or as Martin Buber puts it:

We find the ethical in its purity only there where the human person confronts himself with his own potentiality and distinguishes and decides in this

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<sup>82</sup> J. HOSPERS, *Op. Cit.*, p. 5.



confrontation without asking anything other than what is right and what is wrong in this his own situation.<sup>83</sup>

However, as a discourse of the third degree, ethics is concerned with discovering true statement in the special area of the right and the good, as a response to the moral question people are confronted with. Thus, to agree with John Hospers:

In ethics we cannot simply accept rules and leave them at that, for people will question them or even state other rules which contradict them. Therefore we must try to justify them – to try to find out why they are satisfactory, if they are, and why they are not, if they are not.<sup>84</sup>

## Conclusion

It was the aim of this chapter to elaborate on the essence of morality as studied in philosophy and presupposed in ethics. In the process, we have come to also view metaphysics as an important science, not only for morality, but for ethics as well.

As pointed out, the importance of metaphysics for morality is particularly in that, insofar as it embodies and elicits everything, it supplies morality with the rational foundation necessary for its establishment. This is in fact a roundabout way of saying what was also pointed out, namely, that as a process of valuation, morality presupposes metaphysics.

Ethics has been defined as consisting in evaluating a way of life in terms of what is good or bad on the basis of certain principle. In this respect, metaphysics is also important, particularly in that a sort of metaphysics of conduct precedes moral theorisation or systematisation. At least, morality itself has been viewed as an existential reality – as opposed to determinism, including

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<sup>83</sup> M. BUBER, *To Hallow This Life* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1974), p. 60.

<sup>84</sup> J. HOSPERS, *Op. Cit.*, p. 12.

(but not limited to) moral conformism. The point is that, with regard to the justification of the action, in the final analysis, people ought to be not only moral, but also ethical.

Since it is the proper field and function of ethics to evaluate a way of life in terms of what is good or bad on the basis of certain principles, it remains to determine which principle(s) may constitute the standard(s) of morality and why. But since no reasonable statement can be made about any moral principle until we have verified its truthfulness, we shall first consider some of the moral theories we came across in the literature review.

## CHAPTER THREE: MORAL THEORIES

### Introduction

It is the aim of this chapter to verify the truthfulness of the various moral theories. Nevertheless, given the fact that there are as many moral theories as there are systems of thought or ideals of life, we shall limit ourselves to the positions we came across in the literature review. Notwithstanding the fact that the review itself is far from being exhaustive, these positions may be classified in six categories, namely, moral eudemonism, moral hedonism, moral positivism, moral deontologism, moral utilitarianism and moral existentialism. The choice of these categories may simply be justified by the fact that they offer the most popularly acclaimed moral principles.

Speaking of the verification of their truthfulness, we have already defined their implication for both personal integrity and social cohesion as the criterion for their evaluation. It remains to determine the source for this verification. Now, considering that morality itself unravels the nature of the human being, this source is but the history of humanity. And to agree with William Augustus Banner, "*History is significant, not as the movement of the absolute but as the setting of protests of individuals against servitude, falsehood, and terror*"<sup>85</sup>

Nevertheless, since the development of the moral question "*has been by the gradual accretion of insights, rather than by a systematic evolution in a straight line of progress*"<sup>86</sup> we shall be presenting these various moral theories under their general categories.

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<sup>85</sup> W. A. BANNER, *Op. Cit.*, p. 149.

<sup>86</sup> E.M. ALBERT, e.a., *Op. Cit.*, p. 5.

It may be important to say that a full understanding of these various moral theories requires a grip of their underpinning metaphysics. Nevertheless, we shall have space here only for their ethical implications. This may be justified by the fact that we are interested with normative ethics, that is, a critical study of the major moral theories, as opposed to metaethics or the study of the meanings of ethical terms. References to their underpinning metaphysics will be only indicative.

## **1. Moral Eudemonism**

### **a. The eudemonist theory**

From the Greek eudaimonia (well-being, happiness), eudemonism is the view that happiness is the only thing worth seeking. Applied to morality, this means that actions are termed right or wrong according to whether or not they promote happiness. This is, in fact, the position held by the rational tradition begun by Socrates and advanced by Plato and Aristotle. The stoics and Christian thinkers also partake to this tradition, at least insofar as the end of the human action is concerned. Only that this is simply stated than what is implied in their formulations. The truth is that, although for the eudemonist moralists, happiness consists in rational contemplation, the emphasis varies according to circumstances.

At least, it has been pointed out, Socrates' concern is not much on what things make one's life good, but rather in what way should one lead one's life. Accordingly, happiness consists in good conduct, no matter the implication for one's life.

Although drawing from Socrates, Plato's concern is rather to show how the life of reason is the happiest and the best. And for him, it has been also pointed out, this is not only in that reason is co-natural to the human being, but also in that it is only through rational contemplation that one discovers the essential Form of Goodness. Still, for Plato, it is this essential Form of Goodness or

the Idea of the Good that is the cause of whatever is right and good. Or as he puts it, "*without having had a vision of this Form no one can act with wisdom, either in his own life or in matter of state*".<sup>87</sup>

Aristotle shares his master's ideal of happiness but considers that the Idea of the Good is too exalted an idea to constitute the standard of morality. On the contrary, he maintains that the evaluation of daily life presupposes a "good" which is related to experience, personality and circumstances. Now, considering that even the practice of virtue does not result in the immediate possession of happiness, he maintains that it is wisdom that yields happiness. At least, as well noted by Jacques Maritain:

For Aristotle a morally good act is an act which has not only been worked over, brewed, prepared, adjusted, harmonized, concocted, digested, formed, measured by reason – but, more precisely, which has been measure by reason in its very capacity of tending directly toward the ultimate end of human existence, toward happiness, toward "the good and beautiful, if one hesitates through a kind of fear to call it by its true name, the blissful life".<sup>88</sup>

The stoics also share the idea of wisdom as an ingredient of happiness. Nevertheless, they are more concerned with immediate effectiveness. Wisdom, they maintain, is important for the discovery of the laws that govern the universe. Still, for them, it is the right will that is the most excellent of things sine it is that which, if neglected, forms unhappiness; and well cultivated, happiness. Moreover, they maintain that the will can tend to something only if the latter is perceived as value. At least, for Maritain:

Stoicism made a considerable contribution to moral philosophy, not by bringing to light some fundamental new element, but by showing forth at once the grandeur and harsh demand of the authentically moral life, by insisting on the character of virtue, and especially by clearly emphasizing that aspect of the good (the beautiful-and-good, bonum henestum) which is value. Stoic ethics is an ethics of pure value, doubtless not excluding happiness and beatitude from

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<sup>87</sup> PLATO, *Republic*. VII, 517.

<sup>88</sup> J. MARITAIN, *Moral Philosophy...*, p. 36.

the proper realm of morality as Kant was to do, but making them immediately coincide with value.<sup>89</sup>

However, the ideal of value is particularly what makes the power of attraction of the stoic doctrine for Christian thinkers. At least, with regard to the end of the human action, the Christian doctrine is very much in line with the rational tradition, which "*stresses both the supremacy of man's rational nature and the purposive nature of the universe*".<sup>90</sup>

But according to the Christian doctrine, at least as formulated by Augustine and Aquinas, the true blessings of the soul are not now enjoyed. Since humanity and the planet she lives in are far from being perfect, what is now enjoyed is only a reflection of the heavenly happiness which is, in turn, yielded by obedience to the divine law.

It may be important to say that the Epicureans and utilitarians also consider happiness as the end of the human action. But since they respectively identify happiness with pleasure and utility, we shall consider them separately. Let us now verify the truthfulness of the tenets of moral eudemonism we have just mentioned.

### **b. Critical evaluation**

To start with, it should be said that moral eudemonism seems not only appealing but also reasonable. At least, it is undeniable that most people long for happiness. We are even inclined to believe that it is for this reason that fundamentalist cults or religions are still appealing to large numbers of people. Not much for the consistency of their doctrines but as a desperate search for happiness which, to them, seems illusionary in another context.

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<sup>89</sup> J. MARITAIN, *Moral Philosophy...* p. 56.

<sup>90</sup> E.M. ALBERT, e.a., *Op. Cit.* p. 38.

That moral eudemonism is reasonable may also be seen in that true happiness is considered as a result of actions "*worked over, brewed, prepared, adjusted, harmonized, concocted, digested, formed and measured by reason*".<sup>91</sup> Only that this seems to limit morality to the intellectual realm although it should also be said that knowledge is an important component of morality.

In fact, put in its historical context, moral eudemonism is such a break through, particularly with regard to Socrates who is said to come ("by the will of God") as a reaction to the sophists movement who had made virtues the principal subject of their oratorical tournaments. But as well noted by Maritain:

These virtues were conceived as powers or talents enabling men to make known their value, to escape from their phobias and inferiority complexes, to succeed in public life and however ill governed in its interior universe the soul that used them might be... It was thus an art of making one's way in the world which in the end emerged from a conception of life dominated by a general relativism and by a universal skepticism concerning that which can relate human conduct to ends and values superior to the advantages of the individual.<sup>92</sup>

This is also a reply to the criticism of subjectivism labeled against moral eudemonism. Nevertheless, there are also obvious contradictions within moral eudemonism, starting with Socrates who maintains that it is by ignorance that one becomes wicked and not because one wills evil. In this respect, the question would be whether to know the good is to do the same. At least, to agree with T. Z. Lavine, modern psychology has shown that there are many non-rational forces in human personality – instincts, emotions, passions, impulses, drives – which combat reason and to which reason appears always to be taking second place.<sup>93</sup> In the same vein the moral rationalists' claim that the moral person would always be reasonable in action, no matters

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<sup>91</sup> J. MARITAIN, Moral Philosophy,... p. 36.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. T.Z. LAVINE, From Socrates to Sartre: The Philosophical Quest (New York: Bantam Books, 1989), p. 17.

the consequences for one's life on the basis that reason is the true nature of the human being is also redundant. This argument is further developed in conjunction with moral hedonism.

Speaking of Plato's conception, we may consider that with him morality has some fairly definite content: virtue is now considered worthwhile in itself without regard to utility. Perhaps, we should also tolerate the aristocratic character of his morality, let alone on the basis that everyone can be trained (or trained himself) to become a philosopher. In fact, he considers that the power and capacity of learning how to turn from the world of appearances or becoming to that of reality or being exists in the human soul. Only that, as objected by Aristotle, the Idea of the good – presented as the ultimate and supreme Good, is too exalted an idea to be fully grasped by the human mind. The point is that, although Plato rejects the particular paradoxes of Socrates' morality, his own position is no less paradoxical. Terence Irwin has a nice way of summarizing this point:

The platonic dialogues discuss central question about morality; and both Socrates and Plato defend some controversial and puzzling answers to these questions. Both of them argue that the recognized virtues must be in the agent's self-interest. Socrates adds some claims refuted by Plato, that virtue is craft-knowledge and no more, and that no one can really know what is better and do what is worse. Though Plato rejects these particular paradoxes, his own position is no less paradoxical; he claims that virtue must be a good in itself, that a virtuous man will think it pays to be virtuous even if its results are disastrous and the rewards of vice are splendid; and he demands knowledge of separated transcendent Forms of Justice, Beauty, and so on from anyone with real virtue.<sup>94</sup>

There are even critics who refer to Plato's morality as a utopia. In comparison, Aristotle's morality seems quite realistic and more humanistic. With him, happiness is attainable in concrete life (as opposed to Plato's ideal life) although not immediately, and morality is not limited to the few divine gifted ones, but depends on personality, experience and circumstances.

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<sup>94</sup> T. IRWIN, Plato's Moral Theory. The Early and Middle Dialogues (Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 1.



Note also that Aristotle does not only distinguish moral virtue from intellectual ones; he also considers moral virtue as a state of character concerns with choice lying in a mean relative to the agent.<sup>95</sup> We may, thus, speak of the existential import of his morality although the idea of freedom, which in turn implies moral responsibility, is still implicit in his theory. Nevertheless, there is already a paradox in his conception of happiness. On the one hand, as portrayed in his theory of moral virtues, he sees happiness as resulting from the individual relentless striving, while on the other hand, as portrayed in his theory of good fortune, he sees happiness as depending on a superhuman element. To say the least, in this respect, he is not far from Plato's conception.

Perhaps, we should consider that for Aristotle, it is only as a result of individual relentless striving that happiness is generally possessed and more divine. At least for him, it is generally possessed because it is then accessible to a greater number and more divine because it is the prize offered to those who impress a certain character on their person and their acts.<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless, the fact that a virtuous life is also a life crown with pleasure<sup>97</sup> is likely to lead morality to subjectivism although in the *Politics* (I & VII) he makes the individual's good relate to the good of the State. At least, for Jacques Maritain:

The moral philosophy of Aristotle, which is the truest and the most authentic, the most honest of purely philosophical theories, lacks effectiveness and existence bearing because it is a system of means suspended from an End which does not possess the value of an End practically absolute, nor the value of an End practically accessible, nor the value of an End practically constraining.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II, 1106 b 36 – 1107 a 26.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Eudemian Ethics*, I, 3, 1215 a 13 – 19.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, I, 3, 1215 a 8 – 9.

<sup>98</sup> J. MARITAIN, *Moral Philosophy...*, p. 22.

Stoic morality may, thus, be seen as trying to redress the shortcomings of Aristotle's morality. In fact, it has been pointed out that Stoicism's contribution to moral philosophy is not much by bringing to light some fundamental new element, but by insisting on the character of virtue as related to value. And since value is somehow the expression of common consciousness, stoic morality may be seen as having the advantage of exalting social life. In fact, according to the Stoics, the human being is but a social animal or, as Epictetus puts it, "*a part of a commonwealth*".<sup>99</sup> Only that the insistence on natural laws tends to a fatalistic conception of morality. We may consider that this is overcome by the idea of reasonable actions. But since for the stoics natural laws are the expression of divine providence and that to disobey them would only lead to self-deception, there seems not much left to human freedom.

The same may also be said of Christian morality, even in connection with the idea of the omnipotence of God. In fact, as it was with Plato's morality, Christian morality has also the advantage of offering a certain reference to the moral act beyond the individual arbitrariness. Besides, it is not only humanistic, particularly Aquinas' formulation which takes into account human situation and conditions, but also all-inclusive. In fact, to agree with Maritain:

The great novelty introduced by Christianity is this appeal to all, to free and slaves, to the ignorant and the cultivated, adolescents and old men, a call to a perfection which no effort of nature can attain but which is given by grace and consists in love, and from which therefore no one is excluded except by his own refusal.<sup>100</sup>

Only that, notwithstanding the fact that such a morality can have full bearing only in a religious framework, the question would be that of reconciling the divine will taken as moral reference with the idea of human freedom, which entails responsibility for one's actions. The point is that

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<sup>99</sup> EPITECTUS, *Discourses*, Bk. II, Ch. V. See also D. COMPOSTA, *Op. Cit.*, p. 336.

<sup>100</sup> J. MARITAIN, *Moral Philosophy...*, p. 85.

this is also one of the shortcomings of moral hedonism which, despite their fundamental difference, has a lot in common with moral eudemonism.

## **2. Moral Hedonism**

### **a. The hedonist theory**

In comparison with moral eudemonism, moral hedonism may simply be defined as the view that considers pleasure (hedone in Greek) as the standard for morality. Again, this is simply stated that what is implied. At least for Epicureanism, by the way contemporary to Stoicism, pleasure is good because of its natural kinship to us.

Note that Epicureanism does not only distinguish sensual pleasures from intellectual ones, but also considers true pleasure as consisting in rational acts. And in this respect, reason is important, not only in terms of searching out the motives for all choice and avoidance, but also in appreciating the advantages and disadvantages of the action for the individual.<sup>101</sup> It is also in this sense that Epicureans view virtue. But it should be added that, for them, there is no life worth living, be it the virtuous, without some kind of delectation. However, for them, it is the individual pleasure that is the standard by which to judge the goodness or badness of one's actions.

In fact, this is where moral utilitarianism departs from moral hedonism. But for the sake of clarity, we shall consider moral utilitarianism later on. The following evaluation focuses on moral hedonism.

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<sup>101</sup> Cf. EPICURUS, Letter to Menoecus, 128 ... 132.

## b. Critical evaluation

Speaking of the contribution of moral hedonism, this may be seen in that for it, there is no life worth living – be it the virtuous – without some kind of delectation. Nevertheless, the criticism of subjectivism labeled against moral eudemonism also stands here.

Perhaps, we should consider the fact that Epicurus does not only recognize but also cultivates social virtues (such as friendship, hospitality, gentleness and benevolence) to a higher level. In fact, John Hospers considers that, whereas stoicism has been relatively highly praised, which such cliché as “Bear your troubles stoically”:

With regard to their specific thesis, history has done the Epicureans a grave injustice. The very mention of the terms ‘epicure’ and ‘epicurean’ today brings to most people’s minds images of a gourmand, one who fills himself to overflowing with food and drink, or of a rank indulger of his sensual appetites, or of a decadent wastrel suffering from overrefinement of taste. This was the sort of thing Chaucer meant when he characterized the Franklin (in *The Canterbury Tales*) as ‘Epicurus’ owne sonne’, and it is what the contemporary restaurateur has in mind when he names his establishment ‘The Epicurean Restaurant’. The Epicureans, however, believed just the opposite.<sup>102</sup>

Nevertheless, there is a higher tone of individualism in the moral theory defined by the Epicureans. The truth is that, in the final analysis, it is the individual pleasure that is the standard by which to judge the goodness or badness of the action. Even the just mentioned social virtues are considered second to the individual’s enjoyment.

Besides, there is also a redundancy in the argument that pleasure is good because of its natural kinship to us. In fact, this echoes the eudemonist contention that the moral person would always be reasonable in his action on the basis that reason is the true nature of the human being. This is also to say that both moral eudemonism and moral hedonism as partaking to moral naturalism. The point is that, according to George Edward Moore, to say that something is good because it is

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<sup>102</sup> J. HOSPERS. *Op. Cit.*, p. 50.

natural is already to commit a naturalistic fallacy. The good, Moore would say, is a simple/irreducible quality (not reducible to any other characteristics such as happiness or pleasure).<sup>103</sup> John Hospers is keen in pointing out that not everything that is natural or peculiar to the human being is good or desirable; even the possession of a rational faculty can lead to either happiness or unhappiness, depending on the person and the conditions.<sup>104</sup> Reason is but an instance of morality. At least, to give credit to Thomas Aquinas, "*in the act we must take note of who did it, by what aids or instruments he did it, what he did, where he did it, why he did, how and when he did it*".<sup>105</sup> Only that his own morality turns out to be fatalistic, leaving the standard of good and evil to the will of God.

It is, thus, fair to say that, although it is appealing in many respects, with regard to the standard of morality, moral naturalism is also lacking. Moore goes even further to say that, as an ethical doctrine, moral naturalism "*involves the bare postulate of optimism, and does not follow even from that*".<sup>106</sup>

### 3. Moral Positivism

#### a. The positivist theory

Positivism is the trend which values only things that can be verified empirically. Applied to morality, this means that only what has empirical value may constitute the standard of morality. At least, this is the position held by Hobbes. In fact, it has been pointed out in the literature review that Hobbes considers desires and aversions as the basis for the evaluation of human

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<sup>103</sup> Cf. G. E. MOORE, The Elements of Ethics. Edited with an introduction by Tom Regan (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), p. xl.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. J. HOSPERS, Op. Cit., p. 81.

<sup>105</sup> T. AQUINAS, Summa Theologica I-II, 7, 3.

<sup>106</sup> G. E. MOORE, Op. Cit., p. xl.

actions on the ground that they are the chief determinants of behaviour. Still, for Hobbes, the human being is naturally selfish and that is why the state of nature is a state of war. He then considers social contract as the only context in which human actions may have any moral significance. And the moral standard here is but the dictate of the legislator who is the representative of the "commonwealth". Here, the social contract also means the surrender of the individual's right to be the judge of one's actions.

### **b. Critical evaluation**

To start, moral positivism may be considered a reaction to the subjectivism of moral naturalism. At least, it has the advantage of presenting a common reference beyond the arbitrariness of the individual.

In fact, the same could be said of Plato's and Christian morality, which respectively present the Idea of the Good and the will of God as the standard by which to evaluate the human action. But while the interpretation of both the Idea of the Good and the will of God is left to the individual, for Hobbes, the interpretation of the law is the prerogative of none other than the law-giver. Now, considering that through the social contract, the law-giver acts by consent of the stakeholders, it may be said that Hobbes' morality has also the advantage of fostering social cohesion.

Nevertheless, since for Hobbes it is absolute power which is the prime security of morality, nothing is left to individual freedom. In fact, Hobbes tries to justify this condition in term of commonwealth, of which the law-giver is the representative. We may also consider that the law-giver ascends to this state by the consent of all concerned. Still, there is the question whether the injunctions of the law-giver should always be obeyed, even if s/he becomes a despot or biased as even elected leaders do. The point is that, Hobbes is keen in suspecting the human being as naturally egoistic, yet he advocates the absolute rule of the individual or the minority over

human affairs. To say the least, this is in fact to favour dictatorship. At least, it is against such an external authority that Kant reacts in his moral theory.

## 4. Moral Deontology

### a. The deontologist theory

Moral deontology is the view according to which an act has moral worth only if it is performed from the perspective of duty (*deontos* in Greek). It may be important to say that this position may be assimilated in the virtuous man of Socrates. Nevertheless, it is with Kant that the ideal of duty has come to be stressed with particular force in moral philosophy.

In fact, Kant's morality may also be considered positivist since for him, as already pointed out, duty understood as the determinant of morality is but the necessity of acting from respect of law. But Kant admits no external authority: reason is the only authority he admits for the moral agent. Simply put, he considers duty as the necessity of acting from the dictate of reason alone.

It is also in this sense that, for him, the supreme principle of morality must be a categorical imperative. As it was with Socrates, Kant also maintains that the moral agent should be dutiful regardless of the implications of the action. He goes on to maintain that, by virtue of reason, once an action is judged worth pursuing by a moral agent, it should be so for any moral agent unless the circumstances are different. The moral agent is, thus, presented as the universal judge of the goodness and badness of the action. In other words, Kant founds his principle of the universalizability of morality on reason which is also the basis of his principle of autonomy.

## b. Critical evaluation

From what precedes, it would be fair to say that Kant's morality is the synthesis between moral rationalism and moral positivism. The point is that, in contrast with the categories of moral theory previously considered, Kant's morality (and by extension moral deontology) has the advantage of being concerned with both personal integrity and social intercourse. At least, this is what is presented in the ideal of universalizability of duty.

In fact, for John Hospers, it is its emphasis on the notion of universalizability that is the most important aspect of Kant's categorical imperative.<sup>107</sup> Hospers goes on to compare the categorical imperative with the Christian Golden Rule ("Do unto others as you would have them do unto you") and the Confucian rule ("Do not do unto others as you would not have them do unto you"). And for him, it is the most important part of all moral training.

Nevertheless, Kant's morality has also its own shortcomings, starting with the very ideal of duty. First of all, Kant is well aware that people do not always act from motives of duty, yet he maintains that only actions carried out from motives of duty have moral worth. In fact, this is where he is more of a rationalist than a deontologist. The point is that, as it could be said of the rationalist moral tradition, with perhaps the exception of Stoicism and Epicureanism, Kant's morality is also formalistic. This is in that "*the rightness of an act does not depend (at least not entirely, and in Kant's view, not at all) upon its consequences, actual or probable or intended*";<sup>108</sup> but on its rationality. The question is whether duty always coincides with self-interest. If not, there is already a dilemma on which one of them should be given priority over the other.

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<sup>107</sup> Cf. J. HOSPERS, *Op. Cit.*, p. 276.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264.



Perhaps, we should consider that this dilemma is resolved in the notion of universalizability. Only that, since in the categorical imperative, this notion implies a "wish", it remains to determine which sort of a wish it is. Is it a psychologically possible or a logically possible wish? In fact, Kant resorts to the criteria of logical consistency (as the criterion of judging wishes) and reversibility (as the criterion of judging the involvement of the principle of one's action) in order to eliminate possible misinterpretations. However, the categorical imperative seems too absolute or too rigid a principle to resolve the conflict of extreme situations such as the old conflict between duty and self-interest or even a conflict of duties. His own example of always saying the truth even if one could save human life by doing the opposite stands against him.

## 5. Moral Utilitarianism

### a. The utilitarian theory

As well defined by John Stuart Mill, moral utilitarianism is the trend which considers utility as "*the test of right and wrong*".<sup>109</sup> To focus on moral theory of Mill who is rightly considered the prominent proponent of utilitarianism, utility itself is defined in terms of happiness which, in turn, is identified with pleasure.

In fact, it has been pointed out that moral utilitarianism partakes to moral hedonism. At least, Mill himself traces moral utilitarianism back to Epicurus.<sup>110</sup> But note that for both Epicurus and Mill, by virtue of reason the human being would prefer pleasures compatible to human nature to pleasures that negate human dignity. Or as Mill puts it: "*It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied*".<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Cf. J.S. MILL, *Op. Cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 8 - 9.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

The main difference between moral Epicureanism and moral utilitarianism is in that while for the former it is individual pleasure that is the standard for the evaluation of the human action, for the latter it is the greatest happiness of all concerned. In fact, both Epicurean and Utilitarian moralists rank intellectual pleasures higher than sensual ones. Nevertheless for Utilitarian moralists, the ideal of greatest pleasure is not only with regard to its intensity, duration, certainty, propinquity, fecundity and purity, but also and foremost with regard to its extent. And considering that each person desires his/her own happiness, the utilitarian moralists maintain that it is only through the hedonist calculus that some pleasure would emerge more worthwhile. At least, relying on the social feeling of humanity, that is, the desire to be in unity with one's fellow creatures, Mill maintains that the moral standard is not the agent's greatest happiness but the greatest amount of happiness altogether.

#### **b. Critical evaluation**

It may be important to say that, as a *weltanschung*, utilitarianism is appealing to a large number of our contemporaries. So much so, that even without the knowledge of Bentham's hedonist calculus, the utilitarian principle has become, so to speak, co-natural to most of us.<sup>112</sup> In fact, the utilitarian ideal of the greatest happiness for the greatest number has the advantage of fostering social cohesion. Nevertheless, there is already a fallacy in the utilitarian defense of this principle on the basis that each person desires his/her own happiness.

Perhaps, we should consider that for Mill, the evidence for such a theory is to be sought in the facts of human experience.<sup>113</sup> Only that history is also witness to the fact that there are people who find their happiness in weird acts (say in inflicting suffering to others) and who are

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<sup>112</sup> Cf. A. T. DURNING, How Much Is Enough. The Consumer Society and the Future of the Earth (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1992), p. 22. See also pp. 7-8, 11-12.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. J. S. MILL, Op. Cit., pp. 52 – 53.

masochists so to even wish that their weird acts be universalized. Then, would such acts still be right, regardless of their effects on other people's life, let aside the agent's own? Unless one advocates a culture of violence as sometimes induced in the so-call right of the powerful, the answer is obviously no; since what may be good to one person or one group may not be the same for another person or group.

We may also consider that such weird acts are of abnormal people. In fact, Mill speaks of moral obligation as deriving its binding force from sanctions. He also considers Bentham's hedonist calculus according to which certain pleasures would emerge as more worthwhile on the basis of their intensity, duration, certainty, propinquity, fecundity, purity and their extent as unsatisfactory and adds the criterion of quality. Only that there are critics who find this qualitative principle a blunder. To use the formulation of Hospers, this is:

Partly because if something is (in the long run) less pleasurable and yet better, then one has already deserted pleasure as the sole criterion of desirability and whatever we have left is no longer hedonism; and partly because, in these critics' opinion, the qualitative principle is unnecessary anyway.<sup>114</sup>

Besides, if it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number which is the ultimate determinant of morality, what then with the minority? In fact, this takes us back to the question we have asked in the second chapter, namely, whether the majority can also be wrong. Perhaps this question does not apply fully here. Still, as it was with moral positivism, moral utilitarianism also tends to dictatorship even if this time it is the position of the majority that is taken into account.

The irony is that, at least as implied in the ideal of the greatest happiness for the greatest number, moral utilitarianism has also the advantage of taking into account the consequences of the action. One is, thus, justified to refer to moral utilitarianism as a consequentialist.

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<sup>114</sup> J. HOSPERS, Op. Cit., p. 59.

Notwithstanding the fact that consequentialism is a broader concept including even some forms of moral eudemonism and moral hedonism, the point is that consequences alone do not give a satisfactory account of the human action. At least, not all the consequences of the action are conspicuous and that there is also need to establish human responsibility.

However, it was with moral existentialism that the uniqueness of every individual has come to have its full moral significance.

## **6. Moral Existentialism**

### **a. The existentialist theory**

Existentialism may simply be defined as the doctrine that considers existence as the fundamental value. Moral existentialism is, thus, the view according to which the goodness or badness of the human action should be evaluated from the point of view existence.

But note that for existentialist thinkers, existence has no meaning a priori. At least, as it has been pointed out for Sartre, the meaning of existence depends on the value one attaches to it. Now, considering that the human being is but freedom, existence is but unconditional and unpredictable. Accordingly, actions have moral worth only if carried out by free agents.

By free agent is meant individual person as unique in the place one occupies in the world and as autonomous with regard to one's choices and the conditions of their fulfillment. At least, it is only in this sense that Sartre sees the possibility of creating a human community. Not much by virtue of any law, but in terms of likeness as autonomous beings. However, it is the authenticity of the human being as subject that is the decisive and fundamental value and, thus, the unique criterion of morality.

## **b. Critical evaluation**

To start with, it should be said that existentialism is such a vast domain that to consider only the position of Sartre may be misleading. In fact, in stressing the uniqueness of every individual person, the father of modern existentialism himself, Søren Kierkegaard (1813 – 1855), refers to the Socratic dictum “man know thyself”.<sup>115</sup> Nevertheless, with regard to the space allocated, Sartre is representative enough, not only in that he subscribes to the general trend of existentialism, but also that he has taken the logical conclusions of the principles of existentialism.

At least, as it was with Kant, Sartre’s morality has the advantage of fostering both personal integrity and social cohesion. In fact, there are authors who consider that Sartre does not present any morality, on the basis that he founds value on the consideration of the human person as freedom. But Sartre’s morality is not only realistic; it is also more humanistic. It is realistic in that freedom itself is to be exercised in a given situation, and more humanistic in that it presupposes human conscience. In fact, according to Francis Jeanson, the unique moral recommendation of existentialism is nothing else than a simple transposition of its description of the humane, namely, to live with the rendering of conscience.<sup>116</sup>

The question is that of the outcome of humanity if everybody had to realize his own choice(s) without any restriction from the outside. Perhaps, we should consider that contrarily to what is generally thought of him, Sartre is not an individualist. As it was with Kant, he sets the individual autonomy as the prerequisite for the creation of a human community. He is even more optimistic than Socrates, or is it being naive, by considering that since we always choose the

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<sup>115</sup> Cf. J. MARITAIN, *Moral Philosophy...*, p. 361.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. F. JEANSON, *Le Problème Moral et la Pensée de Sartre* (Paris: Edition du Mytre, 1947), p. 352.

good, nothing could be good for one without being good for all. But note that there is already a fallacy here.

However, to use the expression of Jacques Maritain, if the authenticity of the human subject is the decisive and fundamental value, and thus the unique criterion of morality, then even a criminal, a homicide or a sadist would be a moral person.<sup>117</sup> It is, thus, fair to say that Sartre's morality, which seems to present a much more balance theory, is also a morality of ambiguity.

## Conclusion

To consider the categories of moral theory presented in this chapter, it should be said that they are witnesses to the fact that moral philosophers are generally in agreement on the need to provide a standard for the evaluation of human actions. Only that they fail to agree on the ultimate determinant of morality. Nevertheless, as it could be drawn from what precedes, the difference amongst them is not much in terms of exclusiveness, but in terms of their respective emphases. At least, as it could also be seen from what precedes, the six categories are reducible into two general categories, namely, moral naturalism and moral consequentialism.

Perhaps, we should consider moral positivism and moral deontologism as the antidote of these general categories since, for them, morality is not based on an element inherent to the human being nor on the consequences of the human action, but respectively on law and on duty. Only that the latter are in turn related to the will of the legislator – the supreme ruler for moral positivism and the rational moral agent for moral deontologism. Thus, both moral positivism and moral deontologism are also reducible to moral naturalism. The same applied to moral

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<sup>117</sup> J. MARITAIN, Moral Philosophy..., p. 386.

existentialism since, to use the expression of Francis Jeanson, its unique moral recommendation is but the simple transposition of its description of the humane.

The point is that the advantages and the shortcomings of these moral theories are also applicable to their general categories. At least, Socrates' contention that above all else, one should learn, not how to seem good, but to be so, both in public and private life stands as the deepest insight of moral naturalism. Those of us who have a double moral standard have got a lot to learn from this advice.

Plato is generally referred to as an idealist. But on the contrary of those who consider his morality as a utopia, we think that it helps also to challenge our morality of comfort and focus on the kind of people we would like to be and the kind of society we would to live in. The truth is that a people or society without an ideal is no better than a by-gone people or society. Aristotle's bold statement that reason is the best thing in us and the objects of reason the best of knowable things may also be rendered to support this position.

Speaking of the moral import of Epicureanism and Stoicism, this is particularly in their insistence on a judicious choice of happiness or pleasure as well as of the means of their attainment. Besides, they are also to be given the credit for the consideration that there is no life worth living – be it the virtuous – without some kind of delectation.

Partaking to this insight, Christian contribution is particularly in its universal appeal to perfection. Nevertheless, Augustine also deserves credit for considering that human being earnestly desire peace and that true peace is achieved by love and not by war.

Notwithstanding its danger of slipping into dictatorship, moral positivism distinguishes itself, not only with regard to the prescriptive nature of ethics, but also as a reaction to the subjective nature of the rationalist moral tradition.

As a synthesis of moral rationalism and moral positivism, moral deontology has come up with the principal of universalizability, which is also its deepest insight. Considered in this perspective, moral utilitarianism has the advantage of bringing forth an element almost, if not completely, neglected by the other trends, namely, the consequence or result of the action as a determinant of morality. Finally, drawing from the insights of moral deontology and moral utilitarianism, moral existentialism has the advantage of bringing the human person back to the fore.

However, as it could also be drawn from our analysis, none of these moral theories (and by extension their general categories) is exhaustive. They tend to insist either on personal integrity or social cohesion, or even on both, but fail to maintain them in balance. Thus, considering that it is the ideal of morality to maintain personal integrity and social cohesion in balance, we shall, in that the following chapter, look into the possibility of coming up with a more complete moral theory.



# CHAPTER FOUR: **MORALITY ACCORDING TO HUMAN ASPIRATIONS**

## Introduction

The previous analysis has led to the conclusion that both moral naturalism and moral consequentialism are not exhaustive. Thus, it is the task of this chapter to look into the possibility of coming up with a moral theory which would maintain personal integrity and social cohesion in balance.

Speaking of the shortcomings of moral naturalism, it has been pointed out that John Hospers is also of the idea that not everything that is natural or peculiar to the human being is good or conducive to human happiness. He supports his argument with very challenging instances:

“The American theologian Paul Tillich (1886 – 1965) has defined man as the only creature with a moral sense and as the only creature with a sense of anguish. The French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859 – 1941) has defined him as the laughing animal, and the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1892 – 1971) has defined him as the only animal that is always in heat. Man is also the only creature that performs axe-murders, that puts empty milk bottles on the back porch in the evening, and that saves up his hatred for years while he plots and plans to avenge himself against an enemy. There are many characteristics peculiar to man, some good and some bad; and the fact that some property or faculty is peculiar to man is therefore no evidence that it is good or desirable”.<sup>118</sup>

Hospers' conclusion in this respect is that, depending on the person and the conditions, even the possession of rational faculty can lead to unhappiness in that it can also be the source of anxiety.

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<sup>118</sup> J. HOSPERS, *Op. Cit.*, p. 81.

With regard to the shortcomings of moral consequentialism, the problem is not only that not all the consequences of the action are conspicuous but also that one may have full knowledge of the facts of a situation and yet act upon them only in order to promote one's own interest. The September 11 terrorist attacks on America is a concrete example in this respect.

Another astonishing example is what we read in the Kenyan Daily Nation of Wednesday, 1<sup>st</sup> October 1997:

Members of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) killed 40 villagers, including 10 children, on Sunday night in the massacre-ridden Blida province south of Algiers...Among the dead was an eight-month-old baby whose head was found on the roof of the family home and his body in the kitchen oven.

These are such extreme cases but which illustrate well how "the end justifies the means", as the formula of the extreme wing of consequentialism, may be misleadingly used for political or economical purpose, or even for person interest. The point is that to subscribe to this principle is not only to reduce everything (including humanity – in oneself and in others) to simple means but also to advocate, to use the expression of Hobbes, the state of war.

At least, we consider that morality should take into account, not only human data, but also human aspirations. In fact, this is also the concern of moral naturalism, in particular moral eudemonism and moral hedonism. But as already pointed out by Moore, moral naturalism involves the bare postulate of optimism but does not follow even from that. Besides, happiness and/or pleasure do not exhaust the aspirations of humanity; to give some credit to utilitarianism, there is also the social feeling of humanity. We may also consider the trilogy expressed in the slogan of French Revolution: Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. These are at least notions implied in the first section of this chapter. In turn, the second section is concerned with their implication for morality.

One caution nevertheless: to say that morality should also take human aspirations into account does not mean that it should relinquish the other aspects. At least, although not all the results of the human action are conspicuous, it is only in reference to them that we speak of moral responsibility or imputability, since they are the only "witness" to the agent's intention or even reasonableness. This is also to say that, although we subscribe to the general trend of moral existentialism, in our effort to come up with a more comprehensive moral theory, we shall also attempt to reconcile the advantages of moral naturalism and moral consequentialism. Kant's principle of universalizability will, thus, help us to maintain personal integrity and social cohesion in balance.

## I. Human Person as a Vocation to "Being More"

To consider that morality should take into account human aspirations and human data is already to advocate an existentialist morality. In fact, we have seen with the eudemonist thinkers (hedonists and utilitarians included) that human beings long for happiness. Accordingly, Augustine's contention that human beings earnestly desire peace and that true peace is achieved by love and not by war, stands as a sign of hope for our troubled world. Nevertheless, it has been pointed out that it is with the existentialist thinkers that the human being is brought back to the fore.

In fact, Emmanuel Mounier defines existentialism as a reaction of the philosophy of the human being against the excess of both the philosophy of ideas and the philosophy of things.<sup>119</sup> Only that perhaps misled by Jean Paul Sartre's controversial statement that hell is the others, existentialism has come to be viewed in many quarters as, so to speak, a fight for the survival of

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<sup>119</sup> Cf. E. MOUNIER, Introduction aux existentialistes in Oeuvres de Mounier. Vol. III (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969), p. 70. We shall be referring to this collection, simply, as Oeuvres followed by the volume number.

the fittest. At least, as also pointed out, existentialism includes a whole range of trends going from extreme individualism to extreme conformism. We are rather inclined to speak of human aspirations and human data in personalistic terms, as related to personalism, the existentialist trend which views the human being as a person.

It may be important to note that according to Mounier, personalism is at once a perspective, a method and an exigency. As a perspective, it opposes to abstract idealism and abstract materialism a spiritual realism, that is, a continual effort to restore the unity these two perspectives break up. As a method, it refuses both the deductive method of the idealists and the raw empiricism of the “realists”. Finally it is an exigency of engagement, which is at once total and conditional. Total in that it is concerned with the all of human activities and conditional in that before engaging itself in the action, it must analyse the conditions of its realization.<sup>120</sup> More important still is that to personalist thinkers, if it is true that the human being realizes itself through what he does<sup>121</sup>, the human person is not just his acts. He is not only irreducible to a thing; he is also an aspiration to “being more”.<sup>122</sup> This is in fact a roundabout way of saying what has been said about the human being as a transcendent being. Still to personalist thinkers, the person is not to be confused with the individual or with personality.

## **1. Person as distinct from individual and personality**

To start with, according to Edmund F. Byrne and Edward A. Maziarz, the concept “person” has evolved from Greek antiquity through Latin theology and medieval speculations, which were in turn “secularized” in the writings of Hegel to give way to the modern use of the term. From the idea of a mask used to “impersonate” a character in a play, the term came to mean a socially

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<sup>120</sup> Cf. E. MOUNIER, *Ou'est-ce que le personalisme* in *Oeuvres* III, pp. 242 – 243.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. J. P. SARTRE, *Being and Nothingness...* p. 440.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. K. WOJTYLA, *The Acting Person...* pp. 69 – 70.

masked individual (as Karl Jung would imply in his psychiatry) or an individual substance of rational nature (Boethius). More recently, the term has been used to express in a positive way all that is implied by individuality and uniqueness. However, it is with personalist thinkers such as Nikolai Berdyaev and Emmanuel Mounier that the term is rendered to indicate precisely what escapes both naturalistic determinism and empirical observation.<sup>123</sup> At least, as well noted by Rufus William Rauch, Jr. in his forward to the Personalism of Emmanuel Mounier, "*The person is not an object that can be separated and inspected, but is a centre of re-orientation of the objective universe*".<sup>124</sup>

In fact, Mounier agrees with Karl Marx that a being which is not objective is not a being. But he immediately adds that a being which was nothing but objective would fall short of personal life, that is, the full achievement of the human being.<sup>125</sup> It is also in this sense that he distinguishes person from the individual.

The person is distinct from the individual in that it is mastery, choice, formation and self-realization while the individual presents itself as a self-dissolution in the disordered and impersonal flux of matter, or objects or forces or influences in which it moves.<sup>126</sup> Still, this distinction is not to be immobilized in spatial imagery; it should rather be seen in terms of bipolarity, as a dynamic tension between two interior movements. The distinction becomes even clearer when we consider that for him:

Man is capable of living like a thing; but since he is not a thing, he feels that to live like one is a dereliction of duty: it is the "distraction" of Pascal, the "aesthetic stage" of Kierkegaard, the "inauthentic life" of Heidegger, the "alienation" of Marx, the "self-deception" of Sartre. Man thus distracting himself is living as though exiled from himself, immersed in the tumult of the

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<sup>123</sup> Cf. E.F. BYRNE, ed., Human Being and Being Human (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969), p. 217.

<sup>124</sup> In E. MOUNIER, Personalism (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1952), p. xxviii.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. E. MOUNIER, Manifeste au service du personalisme in Oeuvres I, p. 529.

outer world: such a man is the prisoner of his appetites, his functions, his habits, his relations; of the world in which he merely diverts himself. This is the immediate life, without memory, without plan, without mastery: such is the very definition of externality, or, more simply, of vulgarity. Personal life begins with the ability to break contact with the environment, to recollect oneself, to reflect, in order to re-constitute and re-unite oneself on one's own centre.<sup>127</sup>

With regard to personality, although it is not to be confused with the multiple and ever changing face of individuality, it is still a "miscarriage" of my person. This is in that it remains a compromise between the individual (the different characters amongst which one is drifting, in which one is distracting and/or running away from oneself) and the approximations to the personal vocation. At least according to Mounier, my person as such is always beyond its current objectification; it is supra-conscious, and supra-temporal, vaster than my representation of it, more interior than my constructions of it.<sup>128</sup>

It may be important to note that the body is for the person "*the territory and means of his expression*".<sup>129</sup> In fact, as a conciliatory position on the discussion about the true nature of the human being, Mounier also speaks of the person as an incarnation. To consider this interesting question in detail would take us into psychology and metaphysics since the whole question evolves around the dualism of body-soul consecrated by Plato. For personalist thinkers, however, the person is not much to be seen in term of substantiality, but rather as an effective and desirable mode of being human. At least for Mounier:

The person is not "something" that one can find at the end of an analysis, nor is it a definable combination of characteristics. If it were a sum-total, the items could be listed: but this is the reality whose contents cannot be put into an inventory (G. Marcel). If they could, it would be determined by them; but the person is self-determining and free. It is a presence rather than a being, a presence that is active, without limits. Contemporary psychology has explored several infernal regions in its depths; but has paid less attention to what one

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<sup>127</sup> E. MOUNIER, *Personalism*, pp. 33 – 34.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. E. MOUNIER, *Manifeste au service du personalisme* in *Oeuvres I*, p. 529.

<sup>129</sup> K. WOJTYLA, *Op. Cit.*, p. 213.

might call the heavenly abysses into which its creative exaltation and mystical life ascend. Neither psychology nor the intimations of art have succeeded more than slightly in portraying either these depths or these heights.<sup>130</sup>

In other words, my person is neither my individuality, nor my knowledge or simply my consciousness of it, nor even my personality. It is rather an interior presence and unity of a non-temporal vocation, the total volume of the human being who, it is also important to note, is not – at least in this respect – reducible to a certain category of being. As well noted by Rauch, Jr.:

There are not, then, stones, trees, animals and persons, the last being like mobile trees or a more astute kind of animals. The person is not the most marvellous object in the world, nor anything else that we can know from outside. It is the one reality that we know, and that we are at the same time fashioning, from within. Present everywhere, it is given nowhere. We do not, however, relegate it to the ineffable. A fount of experience, springing into the world, it expresses itself by an incessant creation of situations, life-patterns and institutions. But the essence of the person, being indefinable, is never exhausted by its expression, nor subjected to anything by which it is conditioned. Nor is it definable as some internal substratum, as a substance lurking underneath our attitudes, an abstract principle of our overt behaviour: that would still be a mode of being objective, the ghost of an object. It is the living activity of self-creation, of communication and of attachment that grasps and knows itself, in the act, as the movement of becoming personal. To this experience no one can be conditioned nor compelled.<sup>131</sup>

It is also in this sense that we speak of the person as vocation.

## 2. Person as vocation

It should be said that the term vocation has lost its fundamental meaning through the common usage in which it has come to mean either a harmonious adaptation to natural determinations – temperament, aptitudes, psychic constitutions, character – or a ready-made idea that one has only to discover and then realize. Seen in this way, vocation is nothing but a given model that the individual life would come to reproduce.

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<sup>130</sup> E. MOUNIER, *Personalism*, P. 35.

<sup>131</sup> In *Ibid.*, pp. xvii – xviii. See also E. MOUNIER, *Manifeste au service du personalisme* in *Oeuvres I*, pp. 523 – 524.

In the deepest sense, however, vocation is the living principle in every person, a principle which is at once creator and unifier of the all of one's activity. It is a permanent and ever renewed call to always seek, through one's creative acts, to fulfil one's end as a person. This notion also brings to light the difference between the human being as facticity and the person as the mode of being human. As Jean Paul Sartre would agree with Edmund F. Byrne, "*I am not (merely) what I am; I am also what I am not (yet)*".<sup>132</sup>

In fact, as Byrne takes care to note:

Implied in Sartre's view, of course, is that the ego or self is not something given but rather something that one creates from day to day through his choices and through the carrying out of those choices in action. Thus, somewhat as Heidegger says that the (true) self calls out of the future to the (untrue) self, and somewhat as Jung says that the self is the ideal of the ego, so does Sartre say that the self is the project of consciousness. Buber and other would modify this creational view of the self by insisting that one is called by God to become what he has been created to be. But in either case the self is viewed as a goal rather than as a point of departure.<sup>133</sup>

Again, the consideration of this notion in details would take us into psychology and metaphysics. The point is that it is also in this sense that we view vocation as a gradual differentiation and articulation of one's own potentialities. At least for Emmanuel Mounier:

It (vocation) is a word rich in meaning to the Christian, who believes in the all-embracing appeal of one person. But a personalistic standpoint is sufficiently defined even in this thought – that the significance of every person is such that he is irreplaceable in the position he occupies in the world of persons. Such is the majestic status of the person, endowing it with the dignity of a universe; yet also its humility, for in this dignity each person is equivalent to every other, and persons are more numerous than the stars. It is obvious that this has nothing to do with the pseudo 'vocation' of the professions, which too often follow the bent of temperament or the prompting of the environment.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> E.F. BYRNE, ea., *Op. Cit.*, p. 228.

<sup>133</sup> E.F. BYRNE, e.a., *Op. Cit.*, p. 229.

<sup>134</sup> E. MOUNIER, *Personalism*, pp. 41 – 42.



Accordingly, the person does not merely conform to nature or react against its provocations; it turns against nature to transform and progressively subdue it to the sovereignty of a personal universe.<sup>135</sup> This is another roundabout way of speaking of the human being as a transcendent being since, to use the expression of Teilhard de Chardin, this humanization of the universe is nothing but the fulfillment, though only partially, of the personal life. Still, personal vocation is here viewed in term of freedom.

### 3. Person as an exigency of freedom

Freedom here is not much in terms of indeterminism, but in terms of transcendence, as the ability to realize oneself. In fact, according to Mounier, to speak of freedom in terms of indeterminism would mean to be involved in abstract idealism and, thus, to forget about human data. At least for him:

Personalism is not a kind of spiritual doctrine, but rather the reverse. It includes every human problem in the entire range of concrete human life, from lowliest material conditions to the highest spiritual possibilities... It is therefore true that the explanation by instinct (Freud) and by economic analysis (Marx) are valid ways of approach to all human phenomena, including the highest. On the other hand none, not even the most elementary can be understood apart from the values, the systems and the vicissitudes of that personal universe which is the immanent goal of every human spirit and of the whole travail of nature. Spiritual and moralist doctrines are impotent because they neglect biological and economic necessities; but materialism is no less futile for the opposite reason.<sup>136</sup>

In other words, human data, including (but not limited to) nature and other persons, are also essential for the realisation of the person. Mounier is critical of even existentialist thinkers such as Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Sartre who, according to him, have absolutized the idea of freedom. For him:

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<sup>135</sup> Cf. E. MOUNIER, Personalism, p. 11.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

These thinkers have given us remarkable descriptions of the power to break that is concentrated in personality. But having cleared a space in the world around them, they have nothing with which to fill it except terror, and the person as they conceive it is perpetually on the alert and defensive. They tell us nothing of those propensities of relaxation, of receiving and giving which are also constitutive of personal being.<sup>137</sup>

On the contrary, Mounier considers freedom as a presence directed towards the world and other persons. Thus, the body is not a limitation, but "*an eye wide-open to the world in self-forgetfulness*".<sup>138</sup> In the same way, other persons do not limit my freedom; they enable it to be and to grow. According to Mounier, the person of the other is no longer a threat to my freedom, but rather a kind of mirror to my own person since I only know myself in knowing others, I only find myself in being known by them. In contrast to Sartre's position, the important thing to note in this connection is that the person is not only communicable by nature, but also lonely from the need to communicate. At least for Mounier:

When communication fails or is corrupted, I suffer an essential loss of myself: every kind of madness is a severance of my relations with others – "alter" then becomes "alienus", and I in turn a stranger to myself, alienated. One might almost say that I have no existence, save in so far as I exist for others, and that to be is, in the final analysis, to love.<sup>139</sup>

We may, in fact, speak of a Christian influence in this position. More important is that, communicable, the person is also communion or one-with-others in the communicability of their respective experiences. Now, since communication can be effective only in a community, the latter becomes the cradle of the person. At least, it is in this sense that Mounier considers the community as transcendent to the person, although it should be added that this is not much in terms of importance but as Kant would put it, as a community of ends. Otherwise, as an exigency of freedom, transcendence – understood in the sense of self-determination – belongs to nobody

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<sup>137</sup> E. MOUNIER, *Personalism*, pp. 48 – 49.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

but the person who can still challenge the settings of the community.<sup>140</sup> The truth is that, as it may be expressed in the simple “I may but I need not”, freedom presents itself as both an acceptance and a protest towards the advent of a personal universe. At least for Mounier:

To exist is to say yes, it is acceptance and membership. Yet always to assent and never to refuse is to sink in a quicksand. To exist personally means also, and not seldom, knowing how to say no, to protest, to break away... To be a presence in the world is not easy! I am lost if I flee from it; I am also lost if I give myself up to it. It seems that I cannot preserve my freedom of manoeuvre nor, as it were, the youth of my being, except upon this condition – that I call everything in question at every moment – my beliefs, my opinions, certainties, formulas, loyalties, habits and belongings. Breakage and recoil are indeed essential categories of the personal.<sup>141</sup>

But Mounier is also quick to add that like every other category of the personal, to isolate these ones would mean to distort them. At least, for him, as an exigency of freedom, the person is spontaneity and is not to be confined in a particular instance. Again, this is not much in term of unpredictability although this is also somehow implied, but rather as an eschatology – the already and not yet – of the person. As Byrne puts it, “*to be human means primarily to be open to 'transcendence', that is, to the as yet unfulfilled future*”.<sup>142</sup> It is also in this sense that Mounier speaks of the person as a paradox. However, by “exigency of freedom” is meant that each person is but a subject.

#### 4. The person as subject

It should be said that the term subject has also lost its deepest meaning through its common use as a topic or matter under discussion or even as to imply subjection of one's freedom. Nevertheless, it is here used to mean creative subjectivity, this dimension without which the human being would be reduced to a mere category of things and would thus lose its dignity.

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<sup>140</sup> Cf. E. MOUNIER, Personalism, pp. 116 – 117.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>142</sup> E. F. BYRNE, c.a., Op. Cit., p. 228.

At least, according to Rauch, it would be a mistake to consider that personalism only means that, instead of treating human beings according to type, we shall take their shades of difference into account. This would mean to reduce them to nothing but well-mounted machines in good working order. On the contrary, personalism can best be defined as an appeal to always consider the person as subject, that is, as a responsibly engaged liberty, in whatever response is called for in a given situation, in the realization of its own vocation.<sup>143</sup> Byrne goes even further to consider that this dimension is best translated in term of spirit since for him:

Whatever the attitude or response that is called for in a given situation, it cannot readily be described in mechanistic or even biological terms, but it is amenable to the notion of spirit.<sup>144</sup>

Only that this notion (of spirit) tends to lead to the dualistic conception of the person although Byrne also considers that spirit thinking also helps to distinguish one person from another as they react differently to identical or similar situations. However, the notion of subject is to underline, not only the responsibility of the person as an agent but also the fact that the person is unrepeatable and irreplaceable in the position one occupies in the world of persons. At least for Mounier:

The person is by definition, that which is never duplicated, not even when individuals, steeped as they commonly are in conventionality, most desperately copy and recopy each other's superficial gestures and expressions. But the cult of originality appears always as a secondary product, not to say by-product, of the personal life.<sup>145</sup>

Still, subjectivity does not mean subjectivism. Since it is in relation with others that one finds and realizes oneself, subjectivity is possible only in a world of persons. Mounier is even keen to oppose the idea of absolute discontinuity between free subjects. For him:

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<sup>143</sup> Cf. E. MOUNIER, *Personalism*, p. xvii.

<sup>144</sup> E. F. BYRNE, e.a., *Op. Cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>145</sup> E. MOUNIER, *Personalism*, p. 45.

If every man is nothing but what he makes himself, there can be no humanity, no history and no community (which indeed is the conclusion that certain existentialists end by accepting). Personalism therefore includes among its leading ideas, the affirmation of the unity of mankind, both in space and time, which was foreshadowed by certain schools of thought in the latter days of antiquity and confirmed in the Judeo-Christian tradition... The conception of a human race with a collective history and destiny, from which no individual destiny can be separated, is one of the sovereign ideas of the Fathers of the church. In a secularised form, this is the animating principle of eighteenth Century cosmopolitanism, and later of Marxism. It is flatly opposed to the ideas of absolute discontinuity between free spirits (as in Sartre) or between civilizations (in Malraux or Frobenius).<sup>146</sup>

This is such a powerful way of summarizing the idea of human aspiration and data. It also helps to retrace the existentialist tradition and its various emphases according to circumstances and personalities. However, by subjectivity is also meant that, under whatever guise persons might appear, either the guise of professionalism or that of socialization, or even that of religiosity, they cannot live full lives in terms of categories alone, without any reference to their profound aspiration and to their non-reducibility to things. Or as Mounier puts it:

Every organization, every technique, every doctrine which tends to deny or diminish this fundamental vocation of the person to exercise responsible choice, whatever advantages it may offer, is a poison more dangerous than despair.<sup>147</sup>

It remains to show the implications of these notions for morality.

## II. Posing for a Personalistic Morality

To say that human beings cannot live full lives in terms of categories alone, without any reference to their profound aspiration and their non-reducibility to things is in fact to echo the third formulation of Kant's categorical imperative. Only that our attitudes towards others does

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<sup>146</sup> E. MOUNIER, Personalism, p. 30.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

not always conform to this exigency. Thus, in order to be able to comprehend the full import of personalism for morality, we find it important to elaborate a bit on the attitudes towards others.

## 1. Attitudes towards others

Toward the presence of others, our attitude is either of denial or acceptance, two fundamentally opposed attitudes between which we may place the attitude of "making use" of others.

### a. The denial of the other

The denial of the other may take the form of bitterness, of claim or of hostility, or simply the form of indifference, of coldness and of closure towards the presence of the other. It particularly expresses itself in the attitude of mistrust. The irony is that, since pure subjectivity is humanly unthinkable, mistrust is but the face that avarice turns towards the other. At least, according to Mounier, to the mistrustful the other is a permanent threat to his "property" and this is why he denies him this credit of "person to person" which is an anticipated homage to the effects of generosity.<sup>148</sup>

The facts to adduce in this respect are not far to seek. There is in each one of us a certain instinct to protect from others things or properties we personally cherish. This is obvious in the small child who literally bursts whenever something it has a hold on is removed from it. The point is that this attitude of mistrust can become very dangerous, particularly when it becomes blindness towards the other since, by then, it would mean no less than inaccessibility and inhospitality of heart.<sup>149</sup> Still, such an attitude is not limited to the individual level; it may spread up to the national or even international level. Next to home, this is epitomized by the Hutu-Tutsi

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<sup>148</sup> Cf. E. MOUNIER, *Traité du caractère* in *Oeuvres* II, pp. 475 – 476.

<sup>149</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 475 – 476.

phenomenon, which is a kind of stereotype of the conflicts between Arabs and Jews in the Middle East, and between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland.

#### **b. Making use of the other**

In comparison to the denial of the other, the attitude of making use of the other is somehow a way of being open to the presence of the other. Only that this openness remains at the level of objective relationship. At least, according to Mounier, I may give the impression of accepting the presence of the other but then reduce it to either my own service or a certain mode of being which, in reality, is a negation of the privileges of the personal existence.<sup>150</sup>

One may think of the multiple and various abuses of the person in the political and/or economic arena as the most obvious instances. Still, not only that the other may also be used as *divertissement* or *alibi*; according to Mounier, the most common form of making use of the other is his treatment as mirror or reflector of a self uncertain of itself. This is, in fact, a form of egocentric socialism at the most elementary source of which is the need for confidence or recognition or even the need to be loved, to be appreciated, to dominate, so on and so forth. But since it presents itself as an instance or form of obsession, the other is still conceived in instrumental term. Denied in his dignity, he is not accepted in his creative subjectivity.

#### **c. Acceptation of the other**

As categorically opposed to the denial of the other, his acceptance pertains to trust, this credit of person to person which expresses itself in the notes of the following scale: availability, welcoming, presence, response, comprehension, willingness and happiness of encounter. At least, according to Mounier, the opposite attitude, that is mistrust, is not only the result of a

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<sup>150</sup> Cf. E. MOUNIER, *Traité de caractère* in *Oeuvres* II, p. 483.

misunderstanding of the reality of the other; it also pertains to the imperialism of the individual. By the latter is meant the attitude according to which the integral existence of another human being, with the same privileges, is the most difficult thing to accept beside oneself.<sup>151</sup> The point is that the acceptance of the other begins with the recognition in him of the same privileges as in myself. In other words, to accept the other does not mean to only tolerate his existence by indifference or to abstain from it by a calculus of tranquility, but to apprehend him in his existential reality, that is, as subject.

## 2. Basing morality on human dignity

As it could be drawn from what precedes, to say that morality should take into account human aspirations also means to recognize every person as subject. Only that, with regard to both human acting and what happens to humanity as a result of human acting, this dimension is not always taken into account. In fact, to repeat the criticism brought forth against Sartre, the question is that of the outcome of humanity if every person were to fulfill his own vocation since, according to Mounier, self-affirmation first of all means to give oneself scope and living-space.<sup>152</sup>

But, as also pointed out, personal vocation does not mean incommunicability. At least, according to Nikolai Berdyaev, subjectivity does not mean that the person construes a world of his own.<sup>153</sup> In fact according to for Karol Wojtyla, the fact that one may or may not fulfill himself is also an evidence to the contingency of the person. As he puts it:

The possibility of being good or being bad, that is to say, of fulfilling oneself through goodness or of not fulfilling oneself, shows a special feature of the contingency of the person. The fact that the person can "be" either good or bad

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<sup>151</sup> Cf. E. MOUNIER, *Traité de caractère* in *Oeuvres* II, p. 513.

<sup>152</sup> Cf. E. MOUNIER, *Personalism*, p. 39.

<sup>153</sup> Cf. N. BERDYAEV, *The Destiny of Man* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1960), p. 9.



is of course the consequence of his freedom, and at the same time it reveals and establishes the existence of his freedom. It reveals, moreover, that the way this freedom is used may be right but may be also wrong.<sup>154</sup>

Mounier is also of the idea that there is no obvious limit to the ways in which it is possible for the human being to make his way through the world. But as he takes care to warn, the danger with such a conception is that:

One can no longer tell what man is, and as we watch him today undergoing such astonishing transformations, some think there is no such thing as human nature. For some people, this idea becomes translated into "everything is possible for man", and in that they find some hope; for others, "everything is permissible to man", and with that they abandon all restraint; for others, finally, "everything is permissible against man", and with that we have arrived at Buchenwald.<sup>155</sup>

Thus, in our progress towards the betterment of living conditions and the higher functions of our collective existence, there should be a normative instance as to keep personal freedom in equilibrium with the freedom of others. In fact, moral positivism seems to provide this instance. Only that it fails to trace a line of conduct on the basis of human dignity. At least, for Mounier:

Whenever I treat another person as though he were not present, or as a repository of information for my use (G. Marcel), an instrument at my disposal; or when I set him down in a list without right of appeal – in such a case I am behaving towards him as though he were an object, which means in effect, despairing him. But if I treat him as a subject, as a presence – which is to recognize that I am unable to define or classify him, that he is inexhaustible, filled with hopes upon which alone he can act – this is to give him credit.<sup>156</sup>

This is in fact to take us back the third formulation of Kant's categorical imperative which, considered in existentialist terms, has also the advantage of fostering a community of ends. Only that, viewed in the framework of kantism, it also falls into formalism and, thus, fails to consider, to use the expression of Banner, what is truly and inescapably distinct in comparison to what is

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<sup>154</sup> K. WOJTYLA, *Op. Cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>155</sup> E. MOUNIER, *Personalism*, p. 99.

<sup>156</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 22 – 23.

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common with regard to human aspirations and human data in personal commitment.<sup>157</sup> At least, according to Mounier, it is only through the recognition of human aspirations and data that the fundamental tension of the person is disclosed. This is a roundabout way of saying that the person is constituted by a double movement, contradictory in appearance but dialectic in essence. On the one hand, it is the movement towards the affirmation of personal absolutes that resist any limitation, and on the other hand, it is a movement towards the creation of a universal union of the world of persons.<sup>158</sup>

It is also in this sense that Joseph Fletcher speaks of the authentic life as distinct from mere coexistence. As he puts it:

It must be genuine interexistence, a radical "socialism" or solidarism ... as radically "dialogic" as the incarnation, in which God makes all of mankind one in and with himself.<sup>159</sup>

The point is that according to Mounier and Fletcher, since it is only through love that a human way of life can be made possible, without degrading the subjectivity of the person, to lead an authentic life is to love. In fact, the idea of love may also lead to subjectivism, as Mounier and Fletcher would agree with Rauch that:

The secrecy of the heart in which this transmutation of the universe is decided by personal choice, is the inviolable domain which no one can judge and which nobody knows, not even the angels, but God alone.<sup>160</sup>

However, according to Fletcher, all of this comes down to the personalistic nature of responsibility. The entire line is worth repeating in some length here.

Impersonal laws and principles may and often do in some situations have a validity and claim, but this is true when it is true only for the sake of persons.

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<sup>157</sup> W. A. BANNER, *Op. Cit.*, p. 141.

<sup>158</sup> Cf. E. MOUNIER, *Personalism*, p. 29.

<sup>159</sup> J. FLETCHER, *Moral Responsibility. Situation Ethics at Work* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967), p. 233.

<sup>160</sup> In E. MOUNIER, *Personalism*, p. xxi.

Christians in any case, are commanded to love people, not principles. But a final limiting consideration is of the greatest importance. We are all members of one another, and cannot play favorites, are not 'respecters of persons' in Paul's sense of favoritism out of obsequious or sentimental impulses. Personalism, to parody Sartre's way of speaking, is a solidarism, not a special interest exclusion or selection of some rather than others or of the few rather than the many. The political principle of the responsible man who heeds the call of others is 'one man, one vote'. This is the agapeic dimension of Christian responsibility, its social or non-segregationist nature. And this radical universalism of response is what makes agapeic responsibility a constant threat and judgment to all claims of unique interest.<sup>161</sup>

The idea of personalistic responsibility also explains why our response to others, to persons in situations, must be as radically as the incarnation. However, Mounier's caution that whatever advantages it may offer, every organization, every technique, every doctrine which tends to deny or diminish the fundamental vocation of the person to exercise responsible choice is a poison more dangerous than despair also stands here.

## Conclusion

From the consideration of human aspirations and human data, we have come to base morality on human dignity. Although we have relied on the third formulation of Kant's categorical imperative as offering the basis for the universalizability of morality, we have opted for a personalistic morality. This was to take into account not only human aspirations and human data but also the consequences of the action on both personal and collective existence. At least, it is in this framework that we have tried to reconcile the insights of moral naturalism and moral consequentialism. This reconciliation effort was itself led by the realization that the differences between them are not much in terms of mutual exclusiveness but rather in terms of their respective emphases as coming from a variety of tradition, circumstance and personality.

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<sup>161</sup> J. FLETCHER, *Op. Cit.*, p. 239.

Thus, while recognizing Kant's profound insight, that is, the non-reducibility of the human beings to things, we have rejected his absolutization of duty regardless of the circumstances of the action. At least, we have come to the realization that, although morality and acting differ essentially, they are at the same time united. So much so that morality has no real existence apart from human acting, apart from action. And since in the strict sense acting or action cannot occur where there are no means to make one's dynamization depend on the agent,<sup>162</sup> action is thus the road that has led us to personalistic morality.

Personalism, it has been pointed out, is not only a perspective, but also a method and an exigency. In fact, it should be said that, although they confirm one another in certain realms of thought, there is a plurality of personalisms. At least, to agree with Rauch, "*a Christian personalism and an agnostic personalism, for instance, differ even in their intimate disposition*".<sup>163</sup> Nevertheless, we have relied on Mounier as offering a deeper moral insight. This may be seen in that, according to him, if in final analysis person means a responsible self, there is only one way of being responsible in practice, that is to be responsible to the all of humanity. It is also in this sense that, according to him, "to be" and "self-affirmation" are respectively synonymous to "to love" and "communicability".

However, his moral import is the consideration that either human action would conform to human dignity and thus promote both personal integrity and social cohesion or it would lose its very meaning and thus become a threat to our own race. We are, thus, co-responsible of the destiny of our own humanity.

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<sup>162</sup> Cf. K. WOJTYLA, *Op. Cit.*, p. 119.

<sup>163</sup> In E. MOUNIER, *Personalism*, p. xvi.

# CHAPTER FIVE: MORALITY AND THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY

## Introduction

It is the concern of this chapter to show the implications of personalistic morality, particularly with regard to the future of humanity. In fact, there are many factors intervening in the state of the world, independently of human acting. Nevertheless, climate scientists have shown that human actions contribute much to the destruction of the world but that efforts to avert it are seldom forthcoming. Still, attempts against the world are not only with regard to ecosystems; it is also and foremost with regard to the social structure understood as the cradle of personal and community existence. At least, as Sartre laments of his time:

The century would have been good if there had not been lying in wait for man his cruel, immemorial enemy, the flesh-eating species who had sworn to destroy him, the hairless and malignant beast, man himself.<sup>164</sup>

Mounier goes even further to consider that, insofar as it depends on acting, the only hope for the survival of humanity lies in the "creation" of an all-embracing environment towards the advent of a personalistic universe. Implied here are the different dimensions of the human action. At least, following Maurice Blondel, Mounier distinguishes four dimensions of the actions. There is the economic dimension or the dimension of acting in the technical or practical sense, which aims at the betterment of human living conditions. Next comes the political dimension in the sense that politics aims at the organization of the community. This is followed by the ethical dimension in the sense that ethics aims, not only at the rapprochement, but also at regulating the

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<sup>164</sup> Quoted in A. MANSER, *Op. Cit.*, p. 208.

relationship of the community members as well as the relationship between partners in the economic sector. Finally, there is the contemplative dimension where the action must find its breath and its humanizing inspiration, by referring itself to values the scale of which allows to appreciate the efficacy according to the degree of perfection or the universality – of purpose, effects and human aspirations.<sup>165</sup>

It should be said that these are in no way exclusive entities. In fact, according to Mounier, they can be viewed as separate entities only if they are considered as acts. The difference here is that an act is but an instance of the action which, in turn, is a whole of acts according to how they integrate themselves in one's engagement. And it is only when it becomes permanent that the action may be termed engagement. The point is that, if humanity has to witness the advent of a personalistic universe, morality should be integrated with all these dimensions.

## 1. Morality and Economics

We have just defined the economic dimension of the action as the dimension of the acting in the technical or practical sense, aiming at the betterment of human living conditions. The trouble is that this seems such an idealistic definition. The truth is that economics consists of a whole range of issues going from property, through production, to the accumulation of capital, and where particular solutions are sought according to particular circumstances.<sup>166</sup> Nevertheless, whatever the form in which these problems are solved, it requires some principles. In fact, Robert Heilbroner's The Worldly Philosophers is such a powerful account of the world leading economic principles. The point is that these principles focus rather on profitability and in the process forget the very essence of economics, that is, the personalization of the universe.

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<sup>165</sup> E. MOUNIER, Qu'est-ce que le personnalisme? In Oeuvres III, pp. 200-242.

<sup>166</sup> R. HEILBRONER, Op. Cit., p. 144.

Perhaps, we should consider that, according to Robert Heilbroner, the utopian socialists have made an effort to introduce even a higher level of social responsibility into their economic framework. As he puts it:

The Utopians wanted a new society in which Love Thy Neighbor could somehow be made to take priority over the mean gouging of each for himself. In the communality of property, in the warmth of common ownership, were to be found the touchstones of human progress.<sup>167</sup>

Nevertheless, it is profit making which in final analysis dictates their social schemes. We may also consider that without making profit no business would survive. The trouble is that, to agree with Karl Marx's extraordinary analysis, along with the capitalist integument also inevitably grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation and exploitation.<sup>168</sup>

In fact, for Robert Heilbroner, the capitalist is not necessarily money hungry from mere motives of rapacity.

He is an owner-entrepreneur engaged in an endless race against his fellow owner-entrepreneurs; he must strive for accumulation, for in the competitive environment in which he operates, one accumulates or one gets accumulated.<sup>169</sup>

It is startling to see that, as early as the first half of the nineteenth century, Marx could make such an analysis. More startling still is his prediction of a global economy as a result of successive capitalist crises during which bigger firms absorb smaller ones. We shall return to the advantages of globalization in the following section. The point here is whether the capitalist cruelties – the growing mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation and exploitation – should be tolerated in the name of economic laws. At least, according to Heilbroner, when an industrial monster goes down, the wreckage is far greater than when a little enterprise buckles.

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<sup>167</sup> R. HEILBRONER, *Op. Cit.*, p. 126.

<sup>168</sup> Cf. K. MARX, *Capital* quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

Still, by cruelties are not only meant attempts against personal and/or collective aspirations, but also attempts against the environment, understood in the broader sense as what gives support to existence. It should be said that from the nineteenth century trade union revolution, there has been a considerable effort to integrate personal and/or collective aspirations in economic calculations although in many cases this has remained at the theoretical level. Besides, in reaction to the Socratic revolution of the nineteenth century, that is, the fight against all those modern forces that tend to depersonalize man,<sup>170</sup> there are companies that have gone even too far as to rely on human work-power only in indispensable cases. Thanks to the technological revolution, “uncomplaining steel” have replaced laboring hands. Only that this has resulted in unemployment of a larger number of the population.<sup>171</sup> This issue is likely to lead us into sociology. Let us rather focus on the issue of attempts against the environment.

Perhaps, we may consider that poor people’s attempts against nature are by instinct of survival. But, as well remarked by Mounier, who now subscribes to Gabriel Marcel’s analysis, our chief enemy is that which appears to us to be quite natural, that which goes on by itself according to instinct or habit.<sup>172</sup> At least, according to Alain Durning, by salvaging the present in this way, the poor are also savaging the future. The entire line is worth repeating here:

Dispossessed peasants slash-and-burn their way into the rain forests of Latin America, hungry nomads turn their herds out onto fragile African rangeland, reducing it to desert, and small farmers in India and the Philippines cultivate steep slopes, exposing them to the erosive powers of rain. Perhaps half the world’s billion-plus absolute poor are caught in a downward spiral of ecological and economic impoverishment. In desperation, they knowingly abuse the land, salvaging the present by savaging the future.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Cf. E. MOUNIER, *Personalism*, p. xxv.  
<sup>171</sup> Cf. R. HEILBRONER, *Op. Cit.*, p. 106 and J. BASILE, *Op. Cit.*, p. 26.  
<sup>172</sup> Cf. E. MOUNIER, *Personalism*, p. 34.  
<sup>173</sup> A. DURNING, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 23-24.



Let aside the fact that their state may also be the result of economically motivated political issues, the irony is that the alarming sign is even more serious from the side of the richest. At least, for Heilbroner:

The ecological dangers, foremost among them global warming, will bring not only the need to contain the damage of climatic change in the poor nations, but the even more difficult challenge of reducing climate-warming emissions in the richer nations that are their source.<sup>174</sup>

This is also to mention the danger of the technological revolution. In fact, we would agree with Mike Featherstone that technologies might well extend our field of possibilities and capacity to relate to others in humane and non-violent ways.<sup>175</sup> Basing his hope on the laboratory experience on micro-organisms, Joseph Basile goes even to think that pretty soon new technologies will be able to regenerate the ecosystem of the earth.<sup>176</sup>

The trouble is that, turned into the hands of capitalists who in fact sponsor most of technological researches, these technologies have become means to making more money quickly while, unconsciously or consciously, inflicting more destruction, and even faster, to the earth. The truth is that, if some billion-plus of the world population cripple in absolute poverty, it is not because the world does not produce enough resources, but by lack of charity. This is not as to advocate a redistribution of the world resources without any labor from the part of some quarters – what would be another way of enslaving people – but rather a sense of concern for the future of humanity.

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<sup>174</sup> R. HEILBRONER, *Op. Cit.*, p. 319.

<sup>175</sup> Cf. M. FEATHERSTONE, "Technologies of Post-Human Development and Potential for Global Citizenship" in J. N. PIETERSE, ed., *Global Futures. Shaping Globalization* (London: Zed Books, 2000), p. 205.

<sup>176</sup> Cf. J. BASILE, *Op. Cit.*, p. 31.

Still, to contrast the world of the poor with that of the richest, Linda Starke, in her forward to Alan Durning's How Much Is Enough?, considers that insofar as human wellbeing is concerned, the world of the richest lives beyond the necessary. As she puts it:

For those of us in industrial countries, it is also becoming clearer that after a point, more consumption does not equal greater fulfillment. The recent U.S. publication of *The Overworked American*, by Harvard University economist Juliet Schor, struck a chord with many Americans. She points out that since mid-century, when given the choice, we have consistently opted for more money over more time for leisure and family. Yet has this made Americans any happier? Polls indicate the answer is no. We are trapped on a treadmill of more work, more consumer goods, and hence more destruction of the earth.<sup>177</sup>

The trouble is that poor countries are also trapped in this trend. Thus, our concern, namely, whether it is possible for everybody to live comfortably without bringing on the decline of the planet's natural health. Considering that this is one of the questions that cannot be answered definitively, we would at least say with Alan Durning that, if the life-supporting ecosystems of the planet are to survive, we have all of us to change our values. The passage is worth repeating in some length here.

“We may be ... in a conundrum – a problem admitting of no satisfactory solution. Limiting the consumer life-style to those who have already attained it is not politically possible, morally defensible, or ecologically sufficient. And extending that life-style to all would simply hasten the ruin of the biosphere. The global environment cannot support 1.1 billion of us living like American consumers, much less 5.5 billion people, or a future population of at least 8 billion. On the other hand, reducing the consumption levels of the consumer society, and tempering material aspirations elsewhere, though morally acceptable, is a quixotic proposal. It bucks the trend of centuries. Yet it may be the only option. If life-supporting ecosystems of the planet are to survive for future generations, the consumer society will have to dramatically curtail its use of resources – partly by shifting to high-quality, low-input durable goods and partly by seeking fulfillment through leisure, human relationships, and other nonmaterial avenues... Scientific advances, better laws, restructured industries, new treaties, environmental taxes, grassroots campaigns – all can help us get there. But ultimately, sustaining the environment that sustains humanity will require that we change our values.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> In A. DURNING, *Op. Cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

As we shall see in the following section, it is also in this sense of better laws, restructured industries, new treaties, environmental taxes, grassroots campaigns that we see the importance of politics. The point to note in this connection is rather that, if economic action aims at improving human living conditions, in the process we should not forget that the survival of our own race depends upon the impact of our actions.<sup>179</sup> Note that we are also part and parcel of the global environment.

At least, to agree with Mounier, the humanization of nature does not consist in subjecting but in liberating things as well as humanity. In other words, human relation to nature should be a dialectical of exchange and of ascension and not a relation of subjection. In this respect, Mounier's conclusion is rather religious but nevertheless profound.

When the belonging to nature turns to the mastery of nature, is the world joined to the body and man to his proper destiny. But we must give its correct meaning to this action of man on nature. Such action can't, without disaster, give itself up to the frenzy of its own acceleration – to what Henry Ford was admitting in his reply to the question why he went on for ever developing his enterprise – 'Because I can't stop myself!' It does not consist in subjecting things to the relationship of a slave under a master. The person achieves freedom only in conferring it: and is called to liberate things as well as humanity. Marx used to say of capitalism that its reduction of things to commodities degrades them: to be made merely instrumental to profit deprives the things themselves of the intrinsic dignity which poets, for example, see in them. We contribute to this degradation whenever we use things as mere obstacles to be overcome, as stuff to be possessed or dominated... the Marxist movement, with its belief that the mission of mankind is, on the contrary, to elevate the status of things through the humanization of nature, in this respect approaches the Christian doctrine that the destiny of man is to redeem, both by labour and through his own redemption, the nature that has been corrupted with his fall.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Cf. J. MARTINEZ-ALIER, "Environment Justice as a Force for Sustainability" in J. N. PIETERSE, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 148-171.

<sup>180</sup> E. MOUNIER, *Personalism*, pp. 12-13.

## 2. Morality and Politics

Politics is another term that seems to be losing its profound meaning. From the idea of the organization of the society with regards to the allocation of responsibility, it has come to imply the struggle for power. With the growing number of demagogues, there are even quarters where it is believed that politics is nothing but the art of deceiving people (D'Alembert). But, as already mentioned, we shall rather consider politics in the personalistic perspective where the political dimension of the action consists in balancing the claims of the members of the community and the society at large.

This is, in fact, the traditional role of the state in its legislative, judiciary and executive capacities. The trouble is that, to agree with Marx's startling analysis, the state is more and more becoming the political ruling organ of capitalism.<sup>181</sup> Not only that, even in the self-affirmed models of democracy, the ascension to power is dictated by capitalist interests; the division of society is also being drawn on the economical basis of property.

In fact, as it could be gathered from what precedes, property is also an expression of the vocation of the person. At least, for Mounier:

To possess is, moreover, to make contact, to give up one's isolation, to 'bear with' something. It is possible for 'poverty' to be spurious, sometimes it is even dishonest. Moral idealism is not uncommonly the quest for an existence freed at last from any burden whatever: an aspiration opposed to nature which can end only in ruin, or in anti-humanity. In this sense property, like intimacy, is a concrete requirement of personality. To exclude it for fear of its abuses is utopian, and the communists themselves, apart from few of their sects, have never pretended to abolish it. It expresses the vocation, at once dual and integral, of the person - to be both centered in, and expensive around, himself.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Cf. R. HEILBRONER, *Op. Cit.*, p. 161.

<sup>182</sup> E. MOUNIER, *Personalism*, p. 39.

Only that within capitalism, property is but a means for the accumulation of profit. Thus, justice is indispensable as to reconcile liberty and equality, and to maximize both harmoniously.<sup>183</sup> Still, the trouble is that, notwithstanding the selfish pursuit of some individual members of the judiciary, with the advent of globalization the idea of justice itself seems more and more illusive. At least, to agree with Anthony Manser, "*a just society cannot be founded by unjust methods*".<sup>184</sup>

In fact, as a trend, globalization has the advantage of facilitating the rapprochement of people and cultures. Joseph Basile is even keen to view globalization as the way of pacifying the world in that, with the ever growing number of means of instant communication, the inter-penetration of interests and activities, both private and national, would make blocs lose their specificity. He also thinks that, the more enterprises become associated to every aspect of life (social, technical, commercial, financial, information...), the more interests would be common. And the more interests become common, the more people would learn to understand and appreciate each other. Economic and intellectual challenges would then replace military confrontations and the struggle for life would then reach its safer side.<sup>185</sup>

The point is that, if such a wishful thought has to become a reality, globalization is then to be viewed in the personalistic perspective as coinciding with the totality of the human action in its four dimensions. In fact, according Basile, globalization would be the way of pacifying the world, not only in realizing profit, but also and foremost in fighting social inequalities. The trouble is that, as it is being shaped within capitalism, globalization tends rather to widen the gap between the rich and the poor, and in the process to subject the latter to the former. And as a

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<sup>183</sup> Cf. M.J. ADLER, Six Great Ideas: Truth, Goodness, Beauty, Liberty, Equality, Justice (New York: Macmillan, 1981), p. xi.

<sup>184</sup> A. MANSER, Op. Cit., p. 195.

<sup>185</sup> Cf. J. BASILE, Op. Cit., p. 76.

result, there is an escalation of violence which, from the side of the destitute, may well be considered as an expression of desperation. At least according to an interview of the Pakistani foreign minister with BBC at the Islamic Conference called to address the crisis related to the 11<sup>th</sup> of September attacks on the United States of America, injustice is the root cause of terrorism; injustice creates desperation and desperation leads to irrationalities.

Again, this is not to advocate a culture of violence. The question is rather how to avert it. In fact, since the state ability to maintain law and order has been eroded by the capitalist system, some world leaders have been calling for the establishment of an international body. The body would be made up of representatives of all the regions or even all the countries of the world. These representatives would serve not necessarily the interests of their regions or countries of origin, but the interests of the whole world.

But, notwithstanding the advantages with such an international body, to leave the future of humanity to its ruling would mean to forget that in the advent of globalization the capitalist property has acquired the nature of an anonymous entity. Thus, the idea of justice as indispensable in order to reconcile liberty and equality and to maximize them harmoniously has become even more illusive. In fact, Keith Griffin is also of the idea that the "alternative future" depends on the reconstruction of the state around the nexus of equality, growth, human development and culture.<sup>186</sup> But we still have to answer the question of the principle on which basis this reconstruction would evolve since according to Marx's materialistic view of history, this could well turn into the master-slave cycle.

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<sup>186</sup> Cf. K. GRIFFIN, "Culture and Economic Growth: The State of Globalization" in J.N. PIETERSE, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 189-200.

At least, it is also in this sense that we see the importance of morality for politics, which may also be understood as policies to reduce inequalities. Still, the implication here is not only for collective acting; it is for individual acting as well. Not only that the chance for the survival of humanity comes only in the living manner of everyone of us, but also that nothing that the person is and does is quite without political significance. As well noted by Karl Jaspers:

The chance can come only in every man's manner of living. Every little act, every word, every attitude in millions and billions of people matter. What happens on a large scale is but a symptom of what is done in the privacy of many lives. The man who cannot live in peace with his neighbor, the mischief-maker or secret-ill-wisher or slanderer or liar, the adulterer or undutiful son or negligent parent or lawbreaker – by his conduct, which even behind locked doors is never wholly private – keeps peace from the world. He does, in miniature what on a large scale makes mankind destroy itself. Nothing that man is and does is quite without political significance... We may ask how 'private' conduct can affect political action, when obviously one has nothing to do with the other. The question rightly points to the absence of a direct causal link, but it fails to recognize that a man's private life is symptom of his personality, which is the same in whatever sphere he may move.<sup>187</sup>

It is also in this sense that we maintain that, either human action would conform to human dignity and thus promote both personal integrity and social cohesion, or it would lose its very meaning and become a threat to our own race. Besides, Jaspers' input has also the advantage of showing the interconnection of the four dimensions of the action. At least, we have just set the political action's need for ethical illumination as our premise for the survival of humanity.<sup>188</sup> We have also presented the political action as intimately related to the economic action, which is also to be understood in the sense of the dialectic relationship between the human being and nature.

At least, for Mounier, "*politics is needed to add the rule of ethics to the rigours of technique*".<sup>189</sup> There is no need dwelling again on the ethical dimension of the action since ethics has been the

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<sup>187</sup> K. JASPERS, *Op. Cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>188</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>189</sup> E. MOUNIER, *Personalism*, p. 86.

concern of this essay. Let us rather see how this dimension is related to the contemplative dimension of the action.

### 3. Morality and Spirituality

From what precedes, we may also define morality as a kind of spirituality, at least in the sense that spirituality is the source of inspiration for one's action. In fact, it has been pointed out that, according to Mounier, it is only when the action is, in its totality, integrated in the contemplative dimension that it qualifies as human. Only that, as it may be seen with religious extremism, spirituality may also become a source of perversion including (but not limited to) such attitudes as cannibalism and terrorism. In other words, (misconceived) religious practices are also a threat to the future of humanity. Thus, if humanity is to survive, religion has also to take into account the dignity of the human person.

In fact, basing themselves on what has been referred to as the golden rule of the world major religions, that is, "do unto the other as you would like it done unto you", there are authors who consider religion as the source of morality. At least, according to Karol Wojtyła, the commandment of love is the measure of the tasks and demands that have to be faced by all persons and all communities if the whole good contained in the acting and being together with others is to become a reality. As he puts it:

The commandment, 'Thou shalt Love', has itself a thoroughly communal character; it tells what is necessary for a community to be formed, but more than anything else it brings into prominence what is necessary for a community to be truly human. It also tells what determines the true dimension of participation. This is why the two reference systems – of the relationship to the neighbor and to the membership of a community – must be considered jointly and not separately or, indeed, in opposition to each other, even though their distinction is entirely justified.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> K. WOJTYŁA, *Op. Cit.*, p. 296.



This also echoes Mounier's contention that to act in a responsible way is to love. Wojtyla goes even further to consider the commandment of love as disclosing the roots of alienation. His argument is that it is only through love that we can participate in the humanness of others without subjecting them to our own good. But when this participation sets constraints, which will drain or shift others from their own humanness, the action loses its specifically human quality and becomes defective.<sup>191</sup> Still, for him, responsibility here does not only imply responsibility to somebody; at the same time it assumes the religious meaning of being responsible to God, both in the eschatological and in the temporal sense.<sup>192</sup> In fact, basing himself on H. Richard Niebuhr's analysis, Fletcher does not only distinguish four elements in the notion of responsibility; he also considers responsibility to God as well as to men as the most important.

As he puts it:

H. Richard Niebuhr's *The Responsible Self* (1963) pointed to four elements in the notion of responsibility. Of these the second was that it includes our interpretation of the demand being made upon us in every decision making situation. The third was that our response looks forward to the reactions of others, and the fourth was that it takes account of the givenness of our social solidarity – our continuing membership in an interactive community of existence. But the first element is the one I want to focus upon here; the factor of response as the real key to responsibility. All four of these elements combine to make up what Niebuhr called "fitting action", a concept of situational sensitivity already set out by A. C. Ewing in *The Definition of Good* (1947). 'The first element in the theory of responsibility', said Niebuhr, and I would have said "first" in importance as well as cognitively, "is the idea of response"... He meant, of course, response to God as well as to men.<sup>193</sup>

The trouble comes when religion becomes a mere rite or, as Marx would put it, the opium of the people, meaning by that a capitalist bulldog. Actually, our world is witnessing a mushrooming of religious cults. But in most cases, these are dubious means of either making money (in Nairobi the row and/or rift within the leadership of religious groups has often been over the control of

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<sup>191</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 302.

<sup>192</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>193</sup> J. FLETCHER, *Op. Cit.*, p. 231.

income) or carrying on certain propaganda. At least morally speaking, our present-day world is not better than that of previous generations. Thus, if humanity has to survive, religion also should reconsider its moral implications.

In any case, by contemplative dimension of the action is not necessarily meant a religious meditation although we would agree with Archbishop Robert Sarah that "*The destiny of the human person is clarified and strengthened by the light of faith*".<sup>194</sup> Still, as already pointed out, by the contemplative dimension of the action is rather meant the inspiring instance of the person in his action as a whole. Again, this does not mean a separate instance but rather the fidelity to the absolute value, which is but the human person.

## Conclusion

It was the aim of this chapter to establish the implications of personalistic morality. Its advantage, in this respect, is not only for maintaining personal integrity and social cohesion in balance, but also for being concerned with the destiny of humanity. At least, considering the human action as consisting in interconnected dimensions, we have challenged our common practice with regard to economics, politics and religion on the very basis of the essence of the human action. And every time we have come to the conclusion that, in practice, we are not always in conformity with the requirement of the person as a creative subjectivity. We have also come to realize that, in so doing, we are impeding, not only individual and/or collective wellbeing but also the survival of humanity as a whole.

With regard to the economic dimension of the action, this has been particularly demonstrated with the capitalist system and technology as one of its tool. Still, whereas it is at its level that

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<sup>194</sup> R. SARAH. *Op. Cit.*, p. 25.

economy becomes personalized, politics has been subjected to the capitalist integument. Religion is not an exception either. There was no need to dedicate a whole section to the ethical dimension since ethics has been the main concern of this work. Nevertheless, to agree with Mounier, if there are people who hesitate to accept the guidance of ethics, it is because they have too often seen sentiment, opinion, partisan intrigue or a priori ideology adduced in the name of politics to confuse their calculations.<sup>195</sup>

All the indicators of our present-day world are then in red. The truth is that even a personalistic morality would be unable to propose a way out had not been its insistence on the human being now considered as the absolute value. It is also in this sense that, while unifying the action in its totality, the contemplative dimension of the action is also called for in order to achieve fidelity to this value. We have also considered the commandment of love as bringing into prominence what is necessary for a community to be truly human. Here again, reference to Mounier, as well as to Wojtyla, has been helpful in understanding that the human person has no satisfaction in fabrication and organization unless he finds in them his own dignity, the fraternity of his fellow-workers, and some fulfillment above that of utility.<sup>196</sup> Perhaps we should also consider the shortcomings of a personalistic morality. But without any pretension to infallibility in its principle, these seem rather restricted to its implementation in everyday life. At least, basing himself on the idea that one cannot lead a correct life in a society that is not itself correct, Sartre goes even further to consider personal salvation an illusion.<sup>197</sup> This is also supported by the dehumanization of the person through the capitalist system, to result in the alienation of both the human being and his vision of his own destiny.

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<sup>195</sup> Cf. E. MOUNIER, Personalism, p. 86.

<sup>196</sup> Cf. ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Cf. S. DE BEAUVOIR, Les Mandarines quoted in A. MANSER, Sartre. A Philosophic Study, pp. 139-140.

The human being has thus become his own enemy. In fact, there are people who simply refuse to act, quite apparently considering that in a world so absurd, there is no reason of engaging in one way or the other. But this is also as to forget that the actual colonization of the world, with its disease of the alienation of humanity in the system of things, say the blind pursuit of progress or accumulation of profit, does not have the last word. At least, it is also possible for human beings to set things right. And the cure is but the sense of morality. Otherwise, abstention in this respect is only a delusion. The truth is that we are already engaged by our very situation; whoever will have nothing to do with politics understood in the sense of the organization of the society, passively furthers the politics of *de facto* power.<sup>198</sup>

The point is that it is also in this sense that we see the importance of philosophy, not only as an intellectual exercise, but also and foremost as a prophetic and revolutionary engagement. It is prophetic in the sense of being critical of structures and mentalities, and revolutionary in the sense of advocating their transformation. It is at once an appeal to all the forces that tend to depersonalize the human being to remember his subjectivity and his liberty and a reminder to all of us that the destiny of humanity is not only in our hearts but also in our hands. At least, it is in this sense that for Rauch:

Philosophy is no longer a lesson to be learnt, as by force of habit it had become in the scholastic decadence, but a personal meditation which anyone is invited to begin again on his own account. It begins, like Socratic thinking, with conversion to existence.<sup>199</sup>

It is also in this sense that Dr. Franz Alexander, himself an eminent scientist, defines philosophy in terms of an instance that "*would stop us for a moment in our daily work and induce us to give ourselves an account of what we are really doing*".<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Cf. E. MOUNIER, *Personalism*, p. 92.

<sup>199</sup> In *Ibid.*, p. xxiii.

<sup>200</sup> In M.J. ADLER, *What Man Has Made of Man*, p. ix.

Actually, there are many other issues that we have not been able to address here but which are of great concern for the future of humanity. Such are issues related to education, artificial intelligence, reproduction techniques and warfare. But it is also our belief that the principle defended here still gives the guideline if the world has to witness the advent of a personalistic universe. Or better, even when the universe seems to offer no value at all:

Still, one conclusion valid for action may be drawn – Do what you will, it matters not what, so long as your action is intense and you are vigilant about its consequences.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> E. MOUNIER, Personalism, p. 85.

## CONCLUSION

To try a reasoned and articulated treatise of human conduct is the task we have assigned to this work. Nevertheless, considering that morality itself has been under criticism with regard to its genuineness as an instance for the direction of human affairs, we started by the elucidation of the idea of morality as presupposed in ethics and studied in philosophy. The reference to the latter is not only in that the criticism against morality is reminiscent of the criticism against philosophy, with regard to its genuineness as a mode of knowledge, but also with regard to the foundation of morality.

Wallace attributes the lowering of the level of philosophical instruction to the impact of this charge against philosophy.<sup>202</sup> However, the importance of philosophy is not much in its being an academic discipline, but in its being an instance which would induce us to give an account of what we are really doing. At least, it is in this respect that morality has been viewed, not only as a human phenomenon, but also as unraveling the nature of the human being as a being of moral sensibility. But, since what it is implied by morality is not obvious to everyone, it is not enough to be moral; we should also be ethical. It is important to clarify why we think a certain course of actions is worth pursuing or not.

Now, considering that there as many moral theories as there many schools of thought or ideal of life, it was also the task of this work to determine which of them provides the ultimate standard by which to judge the goodness or badness of the action. But the review of the most popularly acclaimed moral theories has shown that none of them is exhaustive. They all tend to insist on either personal integrity or social cohesion, or even on both, but fail to maintain them in balance.

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<sup>202</sup> Cf. W. A. WALLACE, *Op. Cit.*, pp. vii-ix.

Thus, the need to provide a more comprehensive moral theory. The latter has been reached by reconciling the positions of the general categories of these various moral theories.

In fact, it has been shown that the difference between these moral theories is not much in terms of mutual exclusiveness, but in terms of their respective emphases as coming from a diversity of tradition, circumstance and personality. At least, there are not only differences but also similarities amongst them. It is also in this respect that, for the sake of analysis, they have been reduced into two general categories, namely, moral naturalism and moral consequentialism. Still, none of the general categories is exhaustive; each of them presents but only part of the truth and is also lacking. Thus, the idea of reconciling their positions.

Although Kant's morality has provided the basis for this reconciliation, the reconciliation itself has been done in the framework of existentialism. The move is at once to overcome Kant's formalism and to insist on the very essence of the human action. In this respect, Mounier's perspective has been instrumental in understanding that, whatever advantages it may offer, every doctrine, every organization, every technique which tends to deny or diminish the fundamental vocation of the person to exercise responsible choice, is a poison more dangerous than despair. It is also in this sense that the moral theory defended here is best referred to as personalistic.

As it has been shown in the last chapter, the advantage with the personalistic morality is not only in that it maintains personal integrity and social cohesion in balance, but also in that it is concerned with the future of humanity. In fact, without any pretension of being exhaustive, we have seen the implications of this morality for economics, politics and religion. But, as pointed out in the conclusion of the last chapter, there are many other issues that we have not been able to address here but which are of great concern for the future of humanity. As a recommendation for further studies, it would be important to see the implications of personalistic morality for

other aspects of life such as educational, social and medical, including (but not limited to) reproduction techniques.

Education would be of particular importance in that, since no one becomes a person naively, the real hope for the advent of a personalistic universe lies on education instead of the techniques of enforcement. We would even speak of philosophical instruction, in the sense of a conversion to existence and a reminder that our destiny is not only in our hearts but also in our hands. And this is true for Africa as well as for the rest of the world, keeping in mind that we may blame all the cruelties of the world on the capitalist imperialism, but the bottom line is that we are losing our values. This has also social and medical implications, at least with regard to whether it is possible for everybody to live comfortably without denying or diminishing the ability of each one of us to make responsible choices.

It should be said that the opportunity of such studies has to be seen, not much in the finality of their answers, but in the stimulation of their questions. At least, it is in this sense that this work has to be viewed, with the reminder that the destiny of humanity is not only in our hearts but also in our hands as its existential import. All in all, either human action would conform to human dignity and thus promote both personal integrity and social cohesion or it would lose its very meaning and thus become a threat to our own race. We are co-responsible of the destiny of our own humanity.



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