

Why be moral? Because God wants me to, because it will make me happy, or simply because it is right?

Per Sundman

This article critically examines two different answers to the ancient question, why be moral. The first suggests that valid reasons refer to a specific relation between human beings and God. Here, being moral means to treat oneself and others with the respect that is the due of God's closest friend. The second argues that we have good reasons for being moral when being moral makes us happy (realizes Eudaimonia). The investigation offers two results, one critical and the other constructive. The critical shows how and why both theistic accounts of bestowed human dignity and eudaimonistic accounts offer no relevant reasons for being moral. The constructive result builds on an observation; both accounts presuppose the inherent force of the obligation to act morally right. It shows that the reasons for being moral should be explicated as internal to the very meaning of being moral.

1. Introduction

Why be moral? This is the existential and philosophical quandary investigated in this article. The article starts from an important qualifying assumption, that concrete acts are instances of moral action when they express concern and respect for beings as an ends, as beings vulnerable to humiliation. Acts can have other purposes, of course. Personal enjoyment can motivate eating a piece of bread and, when we are ill, eating can be a way of relieving a loved one, for example. The eating of bread occurs in both cases, but different ends make them different actions. As Christine Korsgaard has argued, ends are internal to actions. Eating bread without any purpose is not an act but mere behavior. Ends determine what kind of action a certain intentional movement is an instance of, and they provide reasons, possibly good ones, for acting.¹ The question here concerns possible good reasons for moral action, i.e. for acts that serve the purpose of respecting humanity, as an end.²

¹ Cf. Christine M. Korsgaard. *The Constitution of Agency: Essays on Practical Reason and Moral Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 227. Korsgaard writes: “The reason for an action is not something that stands behind it and makes you want to do it: it is the action itself, described in a way that makes it intelligible.”

² Cf. Jürgen Habermas. “The concept of Human Dignity and the Realistic Utopia of Human Rights” in *Philosophical Dimensions of Human Rights Some Contemporary Views*. Ed. by Corradetti Claudio

Many attempts to ground dignity in a specific set of morally interesting properties distinctive of human beings have been found wanting.³ This article starts from a different angle. It investigates whether relations, and one purported relation in particular, the one between human beings and God, can offer a grounding for equal human dignity and by extension a strong reason for being moral.

2. The Theistic Account

In a response to commentators Nicholas Wolterstorff makes the following claim: a Christian believer “[...] has an account of why all human beings have the worth that they must have if there are to be human rights; the rights inhere in this shared worth.”⁴ The believer is supposed to hold the following beliefs: “[...] he believes that there is a mode of love that bestows value on the one loved; he believes that God exists and loves each and every human being equally and permanently with that mode of love; and he believes that all human beings, no matter how impaired they may be, share a nature (human nature), and that their possession of this nature is a factor in why God loves them.”⁵ The argument is bold and significant. If valid, it establishes that certain theists only have access to a *grounding* of human rights. Having a grounding is different from a rationale for being moral, and from being merely entitled to believe that all human beings have equal worth. A grounding should establish truth or validity.

2.1. A short Digression on Appraised and Bestowed dignity

Wolterstorff’s argument is formulated in a specific context. The subsequent presentation therefore benefits from a short background.

Gene Outka formulated the distinction between appraised and bestowed dignity in his seminal work *Agape an Ethical Analysis*. Outka writes the following about appraised human dignity: “Those who speak of appraisal will normally treat observable characteristics as a persuasive part of a claim to be acknowledged. Perceived uniformities between persons are stressed accordingly.”⁶ In western history of philosophy, rationality and a self-conscious ability to transcend the laws of nature by being an independent source of action are the most frequently suggested examples of shared and morally interesting capacities.

On the one hand, it appears reasonable to stress the importance of these capacities. Rationality is essential for our ability to deliberate, to act, and to feel in ways that are more

(Dordrecht: Springer, 2012), p. 72. Habermas writes: “The issue is the *worth of the individual* in the horizontal relations between different human beings, not the status of ‘human beings’ in the vertical relation to God or to ‘lower’ creatures on the evolutionary scale. Second, the relative superiority of humanity and its members must be replaced by the absolute worth of any person.”

³ Cf. Jeremy Waldron. “Basic Equality” in *New York University School of Law, Public Law & Legal Theory Research Paper Series Working Paper No. 08-61*, p. 44. Waldron writes: “But it is not enough to come up with some (range-)property that we all share. It must be a property which is intelligible in light of the massively important and pervasive work that principle of basic equality has to do. It must be a really important range-property and it must help us make sense of the normative consequences of this principle [...]” Moreover, such a range property must be possessed by all human beings, if it is to fulfil the task of justifying human dignity.

⁴ Nicholas Wolterstorff. “Justice as Inherent Rights: A Response to my Commentators” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 37.2: 261-279, p. 272.

⁵ Nicholas Wolterstorff. “Justice as Inherent Rights”, p. 272.

⁶ Gene Outka. *Agape: A Philosophical Analysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 166.

subtle than mere inarticulate pain sensations, for example. Furthermore, the very ideas of respecting the agency of others and of holding them responsible for what they have done, presume that human beings can at least participate in determining their behavior and their identities. Hence, the conclusion; a capacity to be self-directing is morally interesting. Let us, for the sake of the argument, assume that worth supervenes on rationality, similarly to the way the picture on a screen supervenes on numerous electric digits.

The problem is; some human beings will never develop this capacity, others will lose it, irretrievably, and the rest of us have unequal shares of it. In addition, given that the capacity determines worth, it is difficult to show why having more of the capacity does not entail having more worth. The logic of the arguments leads to the unwanted conclusions, firstly; that human worth is unequal, and secondly; that merely most human beings have this (unequal) worth.⁷ It looks like an account of unequal moral standing.

For e.g. Wolterstorff, bestowed dignity offers a better explication of why we should think human beings ought to be respected equally just because they are human.⁸ The idea here is that our alleged equal worth is conferred on us, rather than supervening on morally relevant and typically human properties. Gene Outka writes the following telling words: “[...], if God bestows value, man ought to appraise his fellow-man in light of God’s bestowal.”⁹ Thus, the bestowed-dignity argument basically says that worth is given in equal shares by God to each and every human being. This is how the problems of the appraised dignity arguments, their inability to justify equal dignity of all human creatures, are avoided. No human abilities on which worth is supposed to supervene serve as argumentative cornerstones.

2.2. *The Use of Counterfactuals*

Whereas Outka’s contributions consisted primarily in explicating important distinctions, Wolterstorff shows how bestowal of worth actually works.¹⁰ He offers a short, telling, and surprising example. Wolterstorff asks; what if it became known that “the queen in a monarchy” had become friends with one of her subjects, would it not elevate the social standing of that person? The answer, of course, is yes.¹¹ When a monarch becomes the friend of one or a few of her subjects, the status of these individuals changes. It increases in comparison to those who are not the Queen’s friends. So far all is well. It is easy to

⁷ Cf. Nicholas Wolterstorff. *Justice Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 333. Wolterstorff writes: “I submit that the problem confronting Kant’s version of the capacities approach confronts every other version of the capacities approach as well. Whatever capacity one selects, it will turn out that some human beings do not possess the capacity. There is no way around the problems that that fact poses.”

⁸ Nicholas Wolterstorff. *Justice Rights and Wrongs*, p. 352. Wolterstorff writes: “What we need, for a theistic grounding of natural human rights, is some worth-imparting relation of human beings to God that does not in any way involve a reference to human capacities.”

⁹ Gene Outka. *Agape*, p. 159.

¹⁰ See for example Gene Outka. *Agape*, p. 164, 181. On page 164 Outka writes about “[...] bestowal as ascription-of-a-status.” Though this is explicated as a status that is conferred by God, not human beings (it is not supposed to be possible for human beings to alienate themselves, or others, from their God given status), Outka just states this as an alternative way of grounding human dignity, the text does not explain how it works, though it says important, neglected by Wolterstorff, things about theological philosophical reasons for preferring a notion of bestowed dignity. The latter relates to its independence of their being any shared morally interesting distinctively human capacities that could serve as ground for thinking that each and every human being is very important, equally important and more important than individuals of any other species.

¹¹ Nicholas Wolterstorff. *Justice Rights and Wrongs*, p. 358-360.

imagine how, among many groups in present western societies, becoming the friend of say Xi Jinping, Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, or Queen Elisabeth would alter one's social standing. It would constitute an obvious status elevating honor in *some* current status orders. Wolterstorff's point, of course, is that each and every human being has received the great and equal honor of being "one with whom God desires to be a friend."

It is an effective example. We can say: "Aha, this is how bestowal of equal worth works". If dignity or worth is to be morally relevant, it must contain or imply concrete prescriptions about the standing of each and every human being; that equal social standing among all human beings, is right. It is easy to imagine that learning about X being the queen's friend would raise the status of X, at least if X lives in Cambridge and labors as a doctoral student in political philosophy.

Connecting God's friendship with human beings to a worldly mechanism of status elevation offers no easy solution to the problem of justification though. The first unresolved worry concerns the hypothetical nature of the argument. Wolterstorff writes: "Those who believe that there is no God will of course not find God a plausible candidate. But they can ask, in a hypothetical mode, whether theism provides a way of grounding human rights. The main question to consider is what might be the worth-bestowing relation."¹² We shall subsequently return to the meaning of *grounding* a moral conviction. The present task is to step into the shoes of those who believe there is no God, and imagine what a hypothetical argument could achieve, in their eyes. Since one major merit of Wolterstorff's account is its explication of how bestowal of dignity actually works, I offer the following explication of the critical point.

- What if I was a close friend of Alicia Keyes. Would not that make me a celebrity in your eyes?
- Yes, it most certainly would. But her Keyness doesn't even know you exist, does she?
- No.
- So, what is the point?
- I guess I need you to believe that Alicia wants me and her to be friends.
- Good luck.

The example shows that the success of the friendship-version of worth elevation depends completely on whether people believe that I or you and the bestower really are friends. This is important. The success of Wolterstorff's argument does not depend on whether say Josephine Jones and Alicia Keyes are friends. It is the recognition of the relation, not the relation in itself, that accomplishes the elevation. Being Alicia's secret and very real friend would not make any status difference at all. If, however, it would become known that Jones for the last twenty years have been a close friend of her Keyeness, then at the moment this became public, Jones's social standing would raise with the speed of a skyscraper elevator, among some people. The thing is, the same elevation would most probably occur if the same people for some strange reason, in spite of Alicia's and Jones's public denial, came to the steadfast *false* belief that Alicia and Josephine were the best of friends (Alicia fans may have thought that Alicia for the usual privacy reasons just did not want people to know).

So again, as far as social standing is concerned, the important thing is not to become Alicia's friend, it is to make people believe that you belong to her circle of friends. This I contend reveals the troubling insufficiency of references to a counterfactual *grounding*, e.g.

¹² Nicholas Wolterstorff. *Justice in Love* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), p. 150.

in the form of status-elevating relationships. It is the actual belief that makes the elevatory difference. However, it also indicates the other-directed character of the justification of moral beliefs or judgments, such as the one about human dignity. In the end, it must be about validating a conviction, by providing intelligible conviction-supportive reasons, to others.¹³

Could replacing Alicia with God make a relevant difference? Perhaps the elevating function of a friendship with God is not recognition-dependent in the same way? Maybe, in this case, there would be an actual ontological change of status, lowering of some, e.g. T. S. Eliot's beloved cats, and increase of many, just in virtue of God's actual desire to make friends with each of us humans? If so, this would be an effect of an actual relation, not a hypothetical one.

However, besides the fact that it probably is insuperably difficult to justify the belief that *any* God (e.g. Nicholas Wolterstorff's, James M. Gustafson's or Sallie McFague's God) exist, it has not yet been shown that the friendship argument is relevant, i.e. that recognition of the status elevating effects of prestigious friendships pertains to the validity of believing in human dignity.¹⁴ On the contrary. It can explain random upheavals of relative social status, but it does not show that those elevations are morally justified, that adjusting action and politics in ways that recognize them is right.

2.3. Inarticulateness

Nevertheless, perhaps there is a way of saving the idea of bestowed worth from being a mere affirmation of whatever actual status orders there actually are. Though staying within the sphere of royalties, Wolterstorff changed his account in a significant way and wrote as follows in the subsequent monograph: "[...] imagine a monarch. He's a good monarch. Loved by all his subjects; he bestows on all of them the great good of a just political order that serves the common good. But he's rather lonely. So in addition to being a benefactor to all his subjects, he decides to choose a few of his subjects as people that he would like to be friends with. This, for the ones chosen, is an honor. 'I am honored that you would choose me for a friend, they say.'¹⁵ This time it is a *good* monarch. The moral tragedy of British colonial history seems to be evaded with one brushstroke. A good monarch could not be and have never been involved in the administration of any kind of oppression, whether this means that she still is a monarch is debatable of course, given the incompatibility between monarchy and democratic legitimacy. Be that as it may.

¹³ Cf. Richard J. Bernstein. "Does He pull it off? A theistic Grounding of Natural Inherent Human Rights?" in *Journal of Religious Ethics* 37.2:221-241, 2009, p. 227. Bernstein writes: "Although Wolterstorff does not explicitly define what he means by 'grounding,' we can reconstruct what it means for him. To ground a claim is to justify it, to support the claim with good reasons."

¹⁴ Considering it possible to prove that certain positive claims about God correspond to living reality, whatever "correspond" means, involves taking on a tremendous burden of proof. For example, one must explain how the alleged true being of God is available, so that the veracity of accounts about her being can be evaluated. Cf. James M. Gustafson. *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective. Vol 1. Theology and Ethics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981). In this volume Gustafson reconstruct a non-anthropomorphic and non-anthropocentric conception of God as power that bears down upon us and sustains us. Cf. Sallie McFague. *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987). In this modern classic Sallie McFague challenges Christians' usual speech about God as a kind of monarch. She suggests instead three other possible metaphors for God—as mother, lover, and friend. See also Nicholas Wolterstorff. *Justice in Love*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), for a more traditional alternative, i.e. God interpreted as similar to a super perfect person.

¹⁵ Nicholas Wolterstorff. *Justice in Love*, p. 154.

The indirectness by which the trouble is avoided points towards an interesting and problematic inarticulateness. The adjustment of the original explicatory example, from the queen to a good monarch, conceals that admiration of elevated social status, or sheer popularity, are the actual elevators within *the status orders of creation*. A new way of seeing people, offered by say the lens of God's *equalitarian* way of conceptualizing morality does not play any role here. Put in other words, whereas many stories of the gospels, like the good Samaritan narrative, works by inviting the reader to think differently about who counts, and by extension to see why the new way of seeing things is superior, the monarch example does nothing of the sort. The contribution of the divine monarch seems to be nothing else than; "look here, since the supreme power of the universe wants to be your friend, it does not really matter that you are a nobody in the eyes of worldly celebrities." Examples of actual though obviously morally dubious status elevations show that the moral quality of the elevator (Hitler or Mussolini?) determines whether the elevation is right or not. Yet, power or sheer popularity effect the status change.¹⁶

Perhaps there is a different answer. Being loved by someone who loves perfectly might trump fallible human love, even if the human "lover" is a global celebrity. Perhaps the perfectly loving subject is a better status elevator than the very popular one? After all, God is arguably not only omnipotence, i.e. power. Indeed, any emphasis on God as almighty must confront theodicy objections as well as objections about disturbing correlations with anthropomorphic projections ("God" as a mere projection based on a human longing for being loved by a perfect super-parent). Therefore, narratives about the love of God are relevant for the task. Perhaps this love could serve as an interpretative pattern, a conceptual scheme allowing us to identify equal worth in human beings independently of whatever status orders there are. This might be so, since arguably, a perfectly loving God sees things this way. The answer, unfortunately, must be no. The reason is brought forward if we consider the following example.

Imagine two citizens of England. Ava Evans is a successful medical doctor in London. The other, Mia Jones, is a homeless person who lives on the streets of Newcastle, suffering from Schizophrenia and drug addiction. Through coincidence and mutual connections, the doctor befriended the Queen, Elisabeth II. Mia Jones on the other hand lived a lonely life on the margin. One day she met Archie Smith, an unknown retired vacuum cleaner salesperson, who had come to dedicate his life to practicing neighbor love at the local hostel for homeless people.

There are ingredients in this embryo of a story deserving our attention. The first is simple. Being loved by Archie Smith made no difference for the social standing of Mia. Archie's love could never be expressed in actions that turned Mia into a healthy well-adjusted citizen, with a respectable job. Being the Queen's friend, on the other hand, made a quite significant difference for Ava. It boosted her private practice whose services became demanded by many wealthy people in the proximities of Chelsea, London. She became well known, among people that *counts*.

The bestowing subjects are different, in two ways that are as simple as they are significant. One has great cultural capital combined with a significantly elevated social position, and the other dedicates time to concrete care for vulnerable outsiders. The

¹⁶ Cf. Peter Morriss. *Power: A philosophical analysis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), p. 29 f. On page 30 Morriss writes: "Benn's bankrupt financier had a certain amount of power *before* his fall, which he lost when his empire collapsed; although his fall possibly affected people more drastically than any of his previous actions, he did not thereby exercise power. To affect something (or somebody) but not effect (accomplish) anything seems, then, not to be an exercise of power."

straightforward upshot is, being recognized as a very important person by a widely recognized cultural as well as social celebrity is a more effective status elevator than being cared for by an unknown loving person. Indeed, eventually Mia lost contact with the charity where Archie spent his days, she got ill, died alone in an emergency room, and was quickly forgotten. However, as time went by, Archie's social standing changed for the better. In 2021, the local newspaper published a front-page text about Archie, the local hero of 2020.

Moreover, the example contains another possibly crucial asymmetry. Ava is the Queen's friend, whereas Mia is the object of Archie's impersonal other-regarding care. In the first case, there is a special relationship, but not so in the latter case. This brings us to our second point. If it became known that Archie loved Mia more than and differently from how he loved other homeless people, this would discredit Archie's growing reputation. Saint-like local heroes are not supposed to act out of favoritism. Moreover, since the moral qualities of the bestowing subject is not effecting bestowal of worth here, a relevant grounding of human dignity is indeed missing. It apparently cannot consist in the power of love, neither literally nor metaphorically speaking.

So far, we have seen that the force of Wolterstorff's examples, underlines that relationally based changes of worth are recognition dependent, and that equal human worth supervenes on a relation that allegedly would be honoring if one believed there is such a relation. In the eyes of the non-believer, the convincingness of the argumentation is frail. It depends on something which is not argued, i.e. that specific ideas about God are true, or at least credible. This is paradoxical in a bad sense.

Moreover, even if an almighty God, who cares more about the fate of human beings than about the lives of others, in fact manages creation, the conceptual resources needed in order to explicate this as an instance of problematic favoritism in the form of speciesism are available and ready to be used. Having integrated them in our mindset we could say: "Wanting to be attached to humans only, is just random favoritism." The alleged bestowal/grounding of human worth would be compromised.

2.4. *The Collapse into Appraised Dignity*

Can the allegation of favoritism be avoided and the relevance of God's bestowal be retained? Wolterstorff writes:

The very same consideration that makes it understandable why God did not choose crocodiles for friendship makes it understandable why God chose human beings. Since it's in our nature to be persons, we have the potential for friendship with God. Of course, there are blockages to the realization of that potential that have to be overcome by God and by us. The moral breach between us of our having wronged God will have to be repaired; and those who cannot presently function as persons will have to be healed, in this life or the life to come, of that deep malformation.¹⁷

Furthermore, in anticipation of critiques Wolterstorff continues on the next page:

Our possessing human nature provides the potential for friendship between God and us. It's a necessary condition for friendship. But it's not an explanation. The explanation for God's wanting to be friends with us is presumably much like the explanation for why we want to be friends with some fellow human being. We seek to become friends with someone not because we think he merits it, not because his worth

¹⁷ Nicholas Wolterstorff. *Justice in Love*, p. 155 f.

requires it, but because we anticipate that our friendship will be a significant good in the lives of both of us. So too for God's desire to be friends with us.¹⁸

Arguably, God is not guilty of favoritism when desiring to be friends with human beings only, because only human beings are beings with whom friendship is possible, for God. This is so since friendship presupposes personhood and only human beings have the capacities necessary for personhood.¹⁹

What about the fact that not all human beings will ever be persons in this life, and some will cease irrevocably to be persons before they die? This challenge is addressed as follows: If a human being is not a person in this life, God will see to that she or he will develop person specific capacities in the next (eternal) life and because of this, God does desire to be her or his friend here and now, in spite of its temporary one-sidedness. Thus, God makes sure that God eventually has reasons to desire being friends with each and every human being, and with them only. It is a complicated argument. Specific capacities, for personhood, are a presupposition for worth, but arguably, they do not confer worth. A cosmologically significant special relation accomplishes the latter. Worth is created by a relation, which presupposes the same person-making capacities as those on which worth supervenes according to appraised dignity accounts.²⁰ One might consider it simpler just to assume that in the perspective of eternity all human beings have the relevant value-making capacities to a sufficient degree.

The rationale for thinking that every human being, in spite of appearances, has a necessary and sufficient amount of person-making properties resembles asking; what if each and every human being has a sufficient amount of morally interesting capacities, on which their worth supervenes, would not they have equal worth? The answer, of course, must be yes. It is just that this account is as unhelpful as one saying; "what if each and

¹⁸ Nicholas Wolterstorff. *Justice in Love*, p. 156.

¹⁹ Nicholas Wolterstorff. *Justice in Love*, p. 155. Wolterstorff writes: "Of all animals, it's only human animals that can function as persons."

²⁰ The following is a short selection of texts that in similar ways make use of capacity arguments, though it is not in terms of appraised accounts of human dignity in all of them (but the worth of humanity and/or the worth of excellent human beings). Robert Audi. *Moral Knowledge and Ethical Character* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 263. Audi writes: "The broad idea, then, is that *dignity is a higher-order value*. It is an axiological property that depends on moral and other 'higher' values, and it belongs to persons in virtue of their capacity for certain kinds of experiences. Immanuel Kant. *The Metaphysics of Morals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 225. Robert Nozick. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishers, 1988), p. 48-51. Nozick tries to answer the question; "[...] in virtue of precisely what characteristics of persons are there moral constraints on how they may treat each other or be treated." Karl Marx. "The German ideology: Part I" in *The Marx-Engels Reader Second Edition*, Tucker Robert C. Red. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), p. 194 f. Martha C. Nussbaum. *Women and Human Development The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 83 f. John Rawls. *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 505. Rawls writes: "We see, then, that the capacity for moral personality is a sufficient condition for being entitled to equal justice." Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 271. Peter Singer. *Practical Ethics* Second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 57 f. Singer writes: "If a being is not capable of suffering, or of experiencing enjoyment or happiness, there is nothing to be taken into account." Charles Taylor. *Human Agency and Language Philosophical Papers 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 73, 103. On page 103, Taylor writes: "[...] a person is an agent who has a sense of self, of his/her own life, who can evaluate it, and make choices about it. This is the basis of the respect we owe persons. Even those who through some accident or misfortune are deprived of the ability to exercise these capacities are still understood as belonging to the species defined by this potentiality."

every human being has an eternal soul upon which worth supervenes, would not those who have a rationale for believing this have a grounding of human dignity?"

The move supposed to save God from favoritism construes the relation between human and divine not as free gift, as grace with no expected return, i.e. not as worth created by being the object of God's love agape, but as something reciprocal, a mutual good that supervenes on natural capacities (range properties). Something vital is changed here. Specific capacities do the actual argumentative work. They, not God's bestowal, validate the claim about our shared worth.²¹

There are other theistic attempts to justify moral equality though. I have one particular account of bestowed equal worth in mind. John E. Hare writes: "... all humans have the same basic value because they equally receive God's call, not because they are now equally capable of valuable activities."²² According to Hare's argument, obeying God entails respecting each and every human being as an equal, as an end in her- or himself, in virtue of them being called by God.²³ Furthermore; "We know that God is to be loved, and so that God is to be obeyed, just by knowing that God is the supreme good."²⁴ The (allegedly) preemptive reason for acting morally therefore is; God's prescriptions trump ordinary human practical considerations in virtue of being perfectly loving and merciful.²⁵ Allegedly, analogously to the good monarch, perfect love and mercy is supposed to ground God's authority. Arguably, if the obedient act is done for the purpose of realizing the perfect love of the infallible commander, it is done for a possibly perfectly good moral reason.

However, besides the unavoidable burden of providing universally valid reasons for thinking that Hare's Christian God exist, God's alleged equal calling of each and every human being, does not establish the caller as perfectly loving. On the contrary, it can and has been interpreted as another historic attempt to disguise collective narcissism, *humankind's* conception of *his* own superior importance, as morally mandatory.²⁶ Even if this charge is not justified, it shows that Hare's account just as Wolterstorff's ditto can explicate the moral relevance of a specific Christian faith but it does not provide justifying reasons.

²¹ Cf. Andrea Sangiovanni. *Humanity without Dignity Moral Equality, Respect and Human Rights* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017), p. 109. Incidentally, Andrea Sangiovanni's argument for opacity respect, a kind of respectful treatment Sangiovanni claims each and every human being is equally entitled to, is vulnerable to similar objections. She claims that her argument is based on "[...] the right grounding force [...]" of certain interests typical of persons. However, we purportedly have these interests since as persons we are vulnerable in a person specific way, due to "[...] our capacity to develop and maintain an integral sense of self [...]" Thus, this specific capacity is supposed to make persons particularly morally interesting, i.e. the reference to these capacities validate the claim that specific interests of persons, not to be treated with cruelty, have "[...] rights-grounding force [...]" (something not all kinds of interest have). Again, here too capacities provide evidence for the claim that persons have specific rights.

²² John E. Hare. *God's Command* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 131.

²³ John E. Hare. *God's Command*, p. 31.

²⁴ John E. Hare. *God's Command*, p. 58.

²⁵ John E. Hare. *God's Command*, p. 181.

²⁶ James, M. Gustafson. *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective, Volume One, Theology and Ethics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 97. Gustafson writes: "It cannot be denied that the basic trend of the Christian tradition has always viewed God's grace and goodness primarily in terms of his grace and goodness for man." The point is; this basic trend is at best controversial, and at worst unjustified.

Is there a way out? I can see two alternatives. The first leads us back to Wolterstorff's idea of the status elevating effects of publicly befriending a Superstar. This is a *cul-de-sac*. The other option is more complicated, but perhaps more promising.

3. Eudaimonia and Moral Rightness

Besides range property and theistic reasons for being moral, we also encounter subtle (apparently) non-moral reasons within contemporary equalitarian reconstructions of the classical *via Eudaimonia*.²⁷ Eudaimonism names a school of thought that has been continuously influential, among philosophers as well as theological ethicists, since the antiquity, and the Church fathers, to the present day. Definitely more so than ethical egoism, a competing paradoxical account of non- or amoral reasons for being egoistic. It is paradoxical in virtue of being straight forwardly oxymoronic since natural language presupposes that acting right is not only different from but the opposite of intending to further one's own self-regarding interests only.

The *Eudaimonist* claims that we have good reasons to act right, for the sake of its rightness, since (and to the extent that) this will make our lives go well.²⁸ Allegedly, acting right includes a specific intention, i.e. acting because one thinks its right. The problem is how to justify the claim that letting moral motivation trump competing motivations, and determine our movements, will indeed make us happy, and that acting in order to be happy is not significantly different from acting upon moral reasons.

The attraction of happiness is hard to deny. Indeed, it appears nonsensical to claim that though helping my neighbor will make me deeply and lastingly miserable it is the rational thing to do. On the contrary, labelling the choice to offer help rational seems to depend on whether helping will eventually and somehow be gratifying, to me, the agent, or not.

There are different attractions in life though. *Eudaimonists* agree that acting on any attraction for the sake of satisfaction does not constitute happiness, on the contrary. Jennifer A. Herdt and Jean Porter has recently argued that *Eudaimonia* ought to be interpreted as perfected happiness, i.e. the happiness one can receive from practicing the virtues, which entails loving God and neighbor for their own sake, "[...] not solely for the benefit to ourselves of loving them".²⁹

However, perfectionist conceptions of *Eudaimonia* are significantly different from subjective, experience related, accounts of happiness. Perfectionists like Herdt and Porter refer to the happiness of those who are happy for the right reason.³⁰ And, for obvious reasons, "the right reason" is not the same as "whatever makes me happy". Being happy

²⁷ See e.g. Rosalind Hursthouse. *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 103, 167.

²⁸ Rosalind Hursthouse. *On Virtue Ethics*, p. 141, 167. On page 141 Hursthouse writes the following pregnant words: "[...] the perfectly virtuous agent, when she acts virtuously, from virtue, sets the standard for 'moral motivation', for acting 'because one thinks it's right, 'from duty', etc., [...].'" In addition, on page 167 Hursthouse writes: "The virtues benefit their possessor. (They enable her to flourish, to be, and live a life that is, *eudaimon*.)"

²⁹ Jennifer A. Herdt. "Excellence-Prior Eudaimonism" in *Journal of Religious Ethics* 47.1:68-93, p. 90. See also Jean Porter. "Eudaimonism and Christian Ethics A Scriptural Perspective" in *Journal of Religious Ethics* 47.1:23-42, p. 37. Porter writes: "Rather, Christian eudaimonism would begin by challenging our assumptions about what counts as a happy life."

³⁰ Jennifer A. Herdt. "Excellence-Prior Eudaimonism", p. 91. Herdt writes: "While the virtuous rightly enjoy acting well, falling short of virtue is rightly painful, as are circumstances that hinder our good projects and aspirations."

is transformed into being virtuous. Yet the obvious attraction of being happy is different from being virtuous. Explicating feelings of e.g. deep unhappiness as possibly irrelevant for judgments about happiness is problematic.³¹ Socrates presumably experienced the difference between virtue and happiness as his execution came close, for example. Put bluntly, perfectionist conceptions of happiness are difficult to recognize as accounts of happiness. However, since there purportedly is a (perfect) overlap between being truly virtuous and being moral, this equals claiming that the attraction of being moral is the answer to why we should be moral. Apparently, the motivation to be happy plays no independent role here.

Addressing this worry in order to rehabilitate the justificatory role of happiness, Rosalind Hursthouse refers to allegedly common parental reasons for inculcating virtues in one's children, namely that we simply wish them well. Supposedly, this shows that parents assume that the virtues "will enable their children to live well", which means that being virtuous will somehow benefit them.³² Indeed, there is a saying, *honesty lasts the longest*, possibly used by many parents that seems to confirm Hursthouse's claim. It is interesting in several but primarily two respects. The first concerns the straight forward question; under what circumstances is it true? The second concerns whether it articulates morally relevant reasons.

Under what circumstances then, is it true that honesty lasts longest? There is one specific precondition for the proverb to contain a reliable prediction, namely; honesty must somehow pay off.³³ Many things might make honesty pay though. One circumstance is particularly significant. Honesty must be recognized in order to benefit its possessor. Unrecognized not to mention misrecognized virtue does not benefit the person at all, unless "benefit" is interpreted along perfectionist lines, as exhaustively explicable in the terms of being advantageous to the building of one's own moral character. Arguably, when a daughter is told, "tell the truth, honesty will always prevail", the loving parent hardly means; "You will benefit from having taken important steps towards perfecting your character. Even though you will feel bad about being continuously unheralded, at times even mocked and abused, in this brute world of spite, sexist violence and will to power". On the contrary, the saying appears to come with an implicit prediction of people's tendency to praise honesty. Of course, recognition for being an honest person might lead to different kinds of praise and approval, e.g. fulfilment of job market demand. This pay-circumstance is partly about an honesty-friendly environment, and partly about skillfully, in a context sensitive manner, marketing oneself as honest. Again, if one's virtuousness is unrecognized it might mean that one's life goes well, but this is so only if being moral is the most important thing. It might not be, for me.³⁴ Moreover, "Make sure that being moral is your most significant source of happiness" is, again, significantly different from saying "honesty will make you happy".

³¹ See Harald Arthur Prichard. *Moral Obligation*, p. 13, where Prichard calls Aristotle's ethics disappointing in virtue of, among other things, how "[...] it really answers two radically different questions as if they were one: (1) 'What is the happy life?', (2) 'What is the virtuous life?'"

³² Rosalind Hursthouse. *On Virtue Ethics*, p. 175.

³³ Cf. John E. Hare, John E. *God's Command*, p. 66.

³⁴ Cf. Harry Frankfurt. *The Reasons of Love* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 57, 84 f. Frankfurt contends that the issue of importance is more fundamental than morality, that what we love is of utmost importance to us, and that we allegedly love ourselves and our children more than anything else.

The second problem, concerning whether the proverb articulates morally relevant reasons, relates to the first. It says, raising one's child to calculate which character traits that "will last the longest", teaches children that being prudential and being moral are the same, that they are indistinguishable.³⁵ At the least, understanding and making the distinction appears to be downplayed. Yet, Hursthouse writes, "Our characteristic way of going on, which distinguishes us from all other species of animals, is a rational way. A 'rational way' is any way that we can rightly see as good, as something we have reason to do. Correspondingly, our characteristic enjoyments are any enjoyments we can rightly see as good as something we in fact enjoy *and* that reason can rightly endorse." We can add, because acting according to reason arguably is a characteristic way of going on for human beings we have a general reason to act according to reason. Supposedly, fulfilling our typical "way of going on" makes us happy, and missing out, the opposite.

The problem remains though. It makes perfect sense to tell our child, "though honesty may not always prevail, being honest is till right. Therefore, follow your moral compass, rather than ever so careful calculations about the kind of behavior that pays off." Rosalind Hursthouse responds: "...it is one thing to bring up children to seek the good of others, to be generous with their possessions, to tell the truth, to be fair, for virtuous reasons, not for the sake of immediate returns. It is quite another to attempt to do so without stressing the fact that decent returns can reasonably be expected from ordinary people as a pattern in life. (How could we bring them up to be good friends, charitable, loyal, even just, rather than censorious, self-righteous, and deeply misanthropic, if we didn't stress that?)"³⁶ My point is the opposite. Avoiding talk about expected "decent returns" offers a more coherent and possibly more stable way of bringing up children. Indeed the miserable truth-telling child might in time come to think of her moral upbringing as deceitful. This we can say if we like to teach our child that moral integrity is praiseworthy independently of if it makes them happy.

Of course, wishing our child happiness ought to be taken into account. Indeed, parents may wish that their child succeed in life, including that fostering and upholding moral integrity will be satisfactory in a deep sense, and that being upstanding will offer them recognition as trustworthy and good persons. This, however, I dare to claim will be confronted by brute reality. As the child comes of age, he or she will be challenged, by her or his own propensity for *schadenfreude*, and by prevalent cultural expressions of it as "the only true joy", for example.³⁷ Parents may hope that the future social circumstances of their children will bring neither humiliating bullying, nor early death, on those who stubbornly act righteously.³⁸ Still, there is no insulation against having to decide between reverence for morality—understood here as respecting the next person equally—and being alive, at all or in a richer sense of having meaningful relations and work.

³⁵ Cf. Jennifer A. Herdt. "Excellence-Prior Eudaimonism", p. 84. Herdt argues that: "Self-regarding and other-regarding, conventionally 'prudential' and conventionally 'moral' reasons, are not ordered in any stable hierarchy [...]." Yet she claims that "adequate reason" demands "[...] that the action is publicly communicable, publicly defensible, [...]" which I take to mean that each and every affected human being is supposed to have a say. Thus, moving beyond the distinction between prudential and moral reason can only work if each and every human being is supposed to count equally, and if a general right to equal respect is taken for granted.

³⁶ Rosalind Hursthouse. *On Virtue Ethics*, p. 184-85.

³⁷ Cf. Glover, Jonathan. *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (London: Pimlico, 2001), p. 340-345.

³⁸ Cf. Jonathan Glover. *Humanity*, p. 382.

By now, the viciously circular components of the *Eudaimonist* account of justification appear in sight. Rosalind Hursthouse argues that; “But it is quite certain that it is primarily our acting from reason, well or ill, rather than those occasional actions we do ‘from inclination’, that make us good or bad human beings in the ethical sense.”³⁹ Acting from reason allegedly means moving ourselves by what we have, consciously considered, good reasons to do, rather than just behaving from e.g. instinct or sudden strong feelings, say of adoration or hate. The thing is we need an arbiter for determining the goodness or badness of practical reasons. The determiner, as we have seen, is *Eudaimonia* or true happiness, i.e. we have reason to act if the action contributes to our own happiness, and we have negative reason to act if the action makes us unhappy. Moreover, true happiness allegedly follows from using our species-specific faculty of reason. So, if we make use of our ability to evaluate and act upon reasons we become happy, since allegedly by doing this we realize our species specific nature. Therefore, according to *eudaimonistic* naturalism, the action resulting from such a careful use of reason will indeed be right. This naturalist account says that we have good reasons to make use of our ability to reason since it will realize our common as well as distinctive, i.e. proper human functioning.⁴⁰ Put in other words, when you act upon reason you will be happy, and becoming happier, than I used to be, is better than any other kind of practical reasons. The upshot is, it does and cannot show that reason favors “being moral”.

Yet, Hursthouse offers another reply: “We think that (for the most part, by and large), if we act well, things go well for us. When it does not, when *Eudaimonia* is impossible to achieve or maintain, that’s not ‘what we should have expected’ but tragically bad luck.”⁴¹ Unfortunately, such an expectation appears uncertain, at times optimistic. Many have good reasons for fearing that if they act well, life will indeed be bad, in some cases a living hell. Moreover, even if hell seems distant, life involves moments of tragedy. Living well simply offers no insurance against unhappiness. Circumstances beyond our control inevitably affect possible outcomes.⁴² Therefore, happiness related reasons cannot provide a justification of moral equality unless, of course, happiness is made redundant, by arguing that only those capable of being moved by moral reason are truly happy.

To conclude, *we* have good reasons to accept that moral reasons and happiness related reasons for acting are significantly different. This arguably is “more true to life” in virtue of retaining a conception of happiness that coheres with experiences of how righteousness might coincide with unhappiness. Human lives contain tragic choices. This section indicates that relevant reasons for being moral are internal to its meaning. They consist in coherent explications of the meaning of moral rightness. Asking; “why should I not be unjust”, has no other relevant answer than; “because it would be unjust,” and asking “why I ought not to humiliate people” has no answer beyond the explication of the moral wrongness of socially construing some persons *qua* persons as inferior.

³⁹ Rosalind Hursthouse. *On Virtue Ethics*, p. 207.

⁴⁰ See Harold Arthur Prichard. *Moral Obligation*, p. 109, for an elegant explication of Aristotle’s account of happiness as proper functioning.

⁴¹ Rosalind Hursthouse. *On Virtue Ethics*, p. 185.

⁴² Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 74. John Rawls famously argued: “Even the willingness to make an effort, to try, and so to be deserving in the ordinary sense is itself dependent upon happy family and social circumstances.” To this we could add biological and other natural circumstances.

4. The Instability of Moral Reasons?

Arguing that happiness and morality provide different, sometimes mutually excluding, reasons for acting might make morality unstable. John E. Hare recently made the following observation about Kant's argument from providence: "His argument is, first, that morality becomes rationally unstable if we do not have a way to assure ourselves that morality and happiness are consistent (so that we do not have to do what is morally wrong in order to be happy), and, second, that believing in God provides such assurance."⁴³ Hare claims that Kant's position seemingly paradoxically should be labelled *Eudaimonist*. Kant arguably affirms that there is no other end as stable and undoubtedly worthy of our concern as our own happiness. It is paradoxical since after all, Kant argues that there is only one categorical end, namely each person as an end in her- or himself. The importance of *Eudaimonia* is, in Kant's terminology, a mere hypothetical end. It remains the case that being motivated by respect for the equal dignity of persons is judged "rationally unstable" if eternal unhappiness would be a possible consequence. Put in other words, the kingdom of ends is as deficient if partly populated by continuously unhappy righteous people, as it would be if occupied by notoriously happy wrongdoers.

Kant's argument is subtle though. He argues, only beings worthy of being happy will "participate in happiness at the hand of a *wise* creator", and only those who are moved by reverence for the moral law, by reverence for humanity as an end in itself, that is not primarily by inclinations to be happy, are worthy of being happy.⁴⁴ And he famously adds, reason demands that those who act out of respect for the moral law will in the end be perfectly happy, in union with the highest good, God. Though here, in the vale of tears, happiness might seem like a wishful dream, the righteous will in eternity pull the longest straw, and eventually be supremely happy. In apparent harmony with Kant the British ethicist Nigel Biggar claims; the stubborn humanism of Albert Camus's character in *The Plague*, Doctor Bernard Rieux, is allegedly absurd, since it has no cosmic home, since no good God has the last word in this story.⁴⁵ Biggar resembles Kant as he claims that providence offers good reasons (a rationale) for moral action. Nonetheless, the moral law remains the same in a God-less universe. The God of Immanuel Kant does not provide a different or original concept of righteousness. God merely safeguards that the virtue, of being motivated to act on the precious ability to see every next person as an equal, will in fact benefit its possessor.

It is time to turn the argument upside down. We have seen that acting right entails intending to do the right thing, and that this is different from intending to be happy. Thus, unless intention is removed from the concept of action, and besides being speculative, "predictions" about *eudaimonistic* outcomes of intending to act right are irrelevant as moral reasons. Removing intention from the concept of action is an obvious *cul-de-sac*. It would make talk about responsibility senseless and make it impossible to distinguish between action and mere behavior. However refined, accepting happiness as a morally relevant reason is inseparable from transforming moral into mere strategic reason, and strategic reason is indeed morally stable only if it has the greatest power on its side.

⁴³ Cf. John E. Hare, John E. *God's Command*, p. 66.

⁴⁴ Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Practical Reason* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1956), p. 135.

⁴⁵ Nigel Biggar. *Behaving in Public. How to Do Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011), p. 104.

However, moral action is explicable as stable in a different sense. Anyone who acts upon the conviction; “Of course there is a reason for my action. It is something I had to do. It would be inhumane not to”, reinforces the stability of moral action.⁴⁶ At times and places when e.g. a loving Christian God appears to make no practical difference, when faith is not an option; a plain unfounded call to be humane can still motivate action.

Moreover, viewing moral motivation as internal to the recognition of the force the moral demand enables us to explicate the defining properties of *true* heroism. She who risks her only life arguably risks more than he who expects his flawed earthly existence to become an eternal blissful communion with God. Naming the humanism of Doctor Bernard Rieux’s absurd equals saying, aiming at being humane for its own sake is foolish rather than heroic. Probably inadvertently, the moral imperative to respect every next person is transformed into an imperative about smartness; “don’t be stupid!”

So why be moral, if morality demands of us to show equal concern and respect for each and every one? Why not be smart and indulge in what we happen to love, wholeheartedly, ourselves, and a few near and dear ones?⁴⁷ There is a reason. To use those we do not particularly care about as mere instruments is to construe them as commodities, and viewing creatures who can be loved and be vulnerable to cruelty of different kinds as indistinguishable from things, destroys the simplest and most obvious presupposition of moral languages, the distinction between right and wrong. The obvious answer to our question must be; “because the alternative is wrong”. In other words, the result of this investigation consist in an explication of how being wrong in spite of claims to the contrary is indeed different from both disobedience of God, and from erring in terms of malfunctioning (failing to realize eudaimonia, the alleged proper ordering of our nature). Indeed, both of these accounts aspire to provide non-moral reasons for the obvious, that acting morally right is indeed right.

Finally, it might not be the calling of everyone to be a hero, not even just for one day. Nevertheless, taking a stand for equal human worth, in spite of risk, serve the purpose of keeping humane interpretative abilities alive. The future is open. We have learned and we can still learn. Working together to make societies where political dehumanization of strangers is absent, and where the virtues benefit their possessor. It is possible. If many of us humans are smart and care about being moral.

Per Sundman, Uppsala University
per.sundman@teol.uu.se

⁴⁶ Cf. Malka Drucker. “Introduction” in *Rescuers: Portraits of Moral Courage in the Holocaust*. By Gay Block & Malka Drucker (eds.), (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1992), p 5. Drucker writes: “Rescuers do not easily yield the answer to why they had the strength to act righteously in a time of savagery. It remains a mystery, perhaps a miracle. Many helped strangers, some saved friends and lovers. Some had humane upbringings, others did not. Some were educated, others were barely literate. They weren’t all religious, they weren’t all brave. What they did share, however, was compassion, empathy, an intolerance of injustice, and an ability to endure risk beyond what one wants to imagine.”

⁴⁷ Cf. Frankfurt, Harry G. *The Reasons of Love* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 57.

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