

## Moral Character: Hexis, Habitus And ‘Habit’

Joseph Malikail

### Abstract

References are frequent to Aristotle's emphasis on *habit* in discussions of moral development. However, the connotation of the term is emaciatingly more limited in scope than the conceptually kindred terms Aristotle used. The historical or cultural factors leading to the change are briefly described. The paper is mainly an attempt to analyze the content of the two terms: *Hexis* and *Disposition* and their distinct significance in Aristotle's moral psychology. Past and contemporary thinkers are drawn on to clarify or endorse Aristotle's ideas as well as to suggest their relevance to moral education.

---

We need not suppose that Aristotle was convinced by every detail of Plato's arguments in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*. But he accepts in his ethical writings the conclusion of those dialogues that the wise man who wishes for the best life will accept the requirements of morality. (Urmson 1988, 2)

Aristotle's analysis of the virtues is not without its own theistic assumptions. One of his major arguments in support of the claim that *nous*, or “contemplative activity,” is the highest virtue is that it is “divine” (*theion*). We must so “far as we can, make ourselves immortal, and strain every nerve to live in accordance with the best thing in us” NE1177b34-35. (Louden 1992, 170-171).

## INTRODUCTION

In the *Journal of Philosophy of Education* (1987, Vol. 21, No.2), Wilfrid Carr published an article entitled, “What is an Educational Practice?”. Carr pointed out that an earlier concept underlying the word “practice” was different from what it is taken to be now in discussions on educational practice. He held that any contemporary analysis which ignored the historical origin and evolution of “practice” gives us only a fragmented understanding of the term, because “our concept of educational practice is the end-product of an educational process through which an older more comprehensive and more coherent concept had been gradually transformed and changed.” (163).

In the same issue of the Journal, David E. Cooper in comments entitled: “Practice, Philosophy and History: Carr vs Jonathan” *questioned* the received view that “an examination of a concept’s history could have no relevance to its analysis or critique.” (181). Cooper *commended* the attempts of MacIntyre, Rorty, and Charles Taylor among others to correct this ahistorical attitude.

In the book, *Philosophy in History*, (Rorty et al .ed, 1984), Charles Taylor writes:

... the kind of redescription we need in order to be in a better position to take a justified stand frequently requires that we recover previous formulations, precisely the ones we need to give an account of the origins of our present thoughts, beliefs, assumptions, and actions. (18; e.g.: MacIntyre 1990, 61-2).

Even more recently, Bernard Williams has written,

... questions arise from our present ideas of such qualities or ideals as honesty, truthfulness, sincerity and realism... It is obvious that our ways of conceiving these qualities have not been everybody's, and that there is a historical story to be told about the way they came to be ours. (Williams 2002, 7).

In the last decade or so, many philosophers concerned about moral development have shown a renewed interest in Aristotle's writings on ethics (Crisp 1988, 17). Among these philosophers, attention has been less on second-order questions like the nature of morality, though Aristotle did deal also with them, but more with his treatment of moral virtues and character, about their components as well as their development in the individual and in the community. Aristotle's works like *Politics and Nicomachean Ethics* belong to the *practical* branch of philosophy, though not in the sense of being manuals to guide specific actions; they are *practical* that their purpose or aim is not merely to purvey truth but also to *affect* action. Aristotle says, (NE 2.2), " the present treatise is not, like the others, undertaken for the sake of understanding — we are conducting the enquiry not in order to know what goodness is but in order to become good men." (Barnes 1982,77)

Even though Aristotle held that only through reason can man *understand* (cf.: Burnyeat 1987, 7) what *good* life is for man, through the faculty that is specific to man (Urmson 1988, 3; Sorell, 200, 3-4, 10), he stresses the importance of moral "habituation" from an early age, if the individual is to develop to be a moral person (Sherman 1997, 80). That moral personality could be the result of habituation has been questioned by some thinkers, Lawrence Kohlberg (e.g. 1981), among them. They have held that *prima facie* an act done out of habit lacks voluntariness, a logically necessary condition for moral action. How could Aristotle have held such an incongruent view? In R.S. Peters' words:

“Aristotle’s celebrated ‘paradox’ of moral education dealt with the emergence of a rational form of virtuous conduct out of unreflective habits.” (Peters 1974, ch. 13).<sup>1</sup>

## I. THE NARROW CONCEPT OF HABIT

In attributing the term *habit* to an act we may imply that it is unreflective. An example may be that when eating we hold the knife in our right hand. No conscious choice is made; it is physically automatic. This must be the kind of habituation or habitual memory Henri Bergson took as the model when he described habit as somatic (Simon 1986, 46-47). Modern psycho-analysts question this physical ascription as they work on the basis that our cognitions and emotions have a greater role than repetition of physical acts in forming habits. An argument against a wholly physical explanation of habits is the difference among individuals in the number of repetitions of an act that are necessary to form a particular habit.

To describe habits as *automatic* diminishes the force of the *voluntary* condition of the concept less than to state that they are *mechanical*. To do something *mechanically* implies an absence of reference to purpose. Some of what we call habits cannot be explained without reference to purpose. The more automatic some acts are, the more efficiently they serve their purpose, e.g., constituent acts in writing or swimming. However, habits may survive their purpose and become mechanical; one may keep going to the door of one’s former office, even after one’s office has been changed to a new location. Voluntariness is certainly absent in such an act, and a moral action is the very opposite of that. (cf.: Kenny 1989, ch.5).

Though voluntariness and freedom are closely related they are not identical, nor are they present equally in all actions. (Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, Bk.2, chs 4 to 6). One may

choose to do an act that one does not want to; conversely, because of strong desire or antipathy one may be psychologically less free from doing or abstaining from an action. The distinction between freedom and voluntariness is explicit in the discussion of moral virtue by Spinoza, Gilson, and Murdoch. (Murdoch 1970, 37; cf: Goodman 1987, ch .6). For Spinoza, if one fully understands one has no choice. However, an act done purely *out of habit* excludes choice as well as voluntariness and is therefore not in the moral realm. But we use the term *habit* also in a sense that is not so restrictive (Peters 1974, ch.13).

## II. THE CONCEPT OF *HEXIS* OR *HABITUS*

Even though the less restrictive and more complex concept of *habit* is very significant in the context of moral practice, the use of the same word also in the more restricted sense can lead to misunderstanding. What was the original connotation of the term HEXIS (pl.hexeis) that Aristotle used in his writings on character? The Latin word HABITUS to which HEXIS was translated maintained the original concept. HABITUS fell into disuse after the sixteenth century when Latin ceased to be the language of Philosophy (Simon 1986, 55 seq.; cf. Urmson 1988, 4-5). Since then, HABITUS has come to be generally translated, for lack of a precise equivalent, into ‘habit’ with its conceptual limitations. W.D. Ross rendered HEXIS as a *state of character*. Though a more accurate rendering than *habit*, for Aristotle HEXIS can be of both knowledge as well as what we call moral character . Both intellectual and moral virtues are hexeis or habitus, but related to reason in different ways. In Aristotle’s words, “one subdivision [intellectual virtue] having it in the strict sense and in itself, the other [moral virtue ] having a tendency to obey [reason] as one does its father.” (NE I:13). In Chapter 2:6, he says:

Virtue, then, is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it. The rational principle is active in a different way in each kind.

David Ross clarifies the difference in a note:

Aristotle's point is that *alogon* (the faculty of desire) can be said to have *logon* only in the sense that it can obey a *logos* presented to it by reason, not in the sense that it can originate a *logos* — just as many people can 'take account of' a father's advice who could not 'account for' a mathematical property. (1980, 27; cf. Sorell, 2000, 3-4, 10)

Thomas Aquinas, following Aristotle, called the four intellectual virtues — art, science, understanding, and philosophic wisdom — *habitus*. (Pegis 1948, 578-596; McKeon, 1978, S50). But they are neither habits in our current usage nor (*a la* Ross) states of character. Within the field of Ethics the rendering of *hexis* or *habitus* as "habit", as mentioned, confuses concepts: in Aristotle, the moral virtues — temperance, fortitude, justice and prudence — are *hexeis*, but they are not habits in English usage.

David Carr refers (1985, 48) to G.H. Von Wright who in his *Varieties of Goodness* (1963, 46) maintains that the Aristotelian ingredients of a state of character and choice — in accordance with the principles of practical wisdom, *Phronesis* — need to be supplemented by "an emotion, or feeling, or passion", to give a complete account of virtue. The footnote from Ross cited above indicates that, for Aristotle, the relationship between desire and practical reason is implicit. Does Aristotle really exclude "emotion, or feeling, or passion", as Von Wright thinks?

Nancy Sherman's reading is:

Aristotle is [nonetheless] pointing to an important way that the emotional structure of character involves choice, and consequently, an important way in which we do choose how to express our character through our emotions. What is fundamental here is the notion of habituating good character. The choice is in cultivating or habituating emotions so that they will become reliable sources for the many roles emotions play in the moral life. Through education, we choose the "condition" of our emotions, choose to transform them or cultivate them, as part of the process of forming our states of character or *hexeis*. (1997. 78; cf. Williams 1985, 35).

Yves Simon (1986, 71 seq.) has used the word *Readiness* for *hexis* or *habitus*, both intellectual and moral. He distinguishes between *qualitative* readiness and *existential* readiness (cf: Aristotle *Metaphysics*, V: 9). Both intellectual and moral virtues embody qualitative readiness, while existential readiness is the property of only moral virtues. A person may be qualified and competent to do something (qualitative readiness), but he may because of, for example, laziness never make the effort. In Simon's terms, such a person lacks existential readiness. Actualization of existential readiness may be good or bad. In this respect man is no different from nature. Just as things in nature used appropriately or inappropriately can produce respectively good or bad results, one's existential readiness can express itself in virtue or in vice. To clarify that there are thus possibly two contrary expressions of moral *habitus*, Simon quotes the parallel with nature that Friar Lawrence draws in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, (Act. II, scene 3):

Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied,  
And vice sometimes by action dignified.  
Within the infant rind of this small flower  
Poison hath residence, and medicine power;

For this being smelt, with that part cheers each part,  
Being tasted, slay all senses of the heart.  
Two such opposed kings encamp them still  
In man as well as herbs,—grace and rude will,  
And where the worst is predominant,  
Full soon the canker death eats up that plant.

Simon remarks that after Kant, the sense of affinity between the world of man and the world of nature hardly finds expression:

I do not say that you cannot find in Kant some qualified recognition that morality may have something to do with nature. .. But when Kant speaks of the starry skies above and the moral law within, he wants to bring out not what they might have in common, but what sets them apart. By contrast, in Shakespeare no less than Aristotle, there is continuity between the laws of nature and the laws of morality and the “virtue” of a physical thing is so called because of perceived resemblances to moral virtue. (Simon 1986, 75).

‘*Grace*’ and ‘*Rude Will*’ (Friar Lawrence’s words) are both *dispositions* of character. Good or bad actions may correspond to a *disposition*, indicative of a state of character. Hexis, habitus or disposition is a general term for a person’s readiness to act in a certain way. It finds expression in acts of particular virtues or vices like honesty, generosity, cheerfulness, jealousy or cruelty.

The Greek word *Diathesis*, in Latin *Dispositio*, means to put things in a certain order. Ordering or arranging implies relating one thing to another; evidently a disposition has parts. Aquinas (*Summa* I and II) refers to Aristotle as saying (*Metaphysics* V) that *habitus* is a *dispositio* whereby whatever is disposed is well or ill either in regard to itself or in regard to another — e.g. health. For Simon (1986, 84):



By a man's disposition we mean precisely the unique arrangement of all his moral traits. And when the arrangement makes him totally reliable and dependable in human affairs, we call the man and his disposition virtuous.

For Aristotle, the dependable moral disposition is a compound product of nature, habit (repeated practice) and reason, achieved by their right ordering. What constitutes this 'compound product' should be understood in context:

The expression of the human soul in wish, desire, intent, action etc. is extraordinarily complex and, in the effort to master this complexity, one may present (parts of) that expression as the outcome of the interweaving of different powers. But this is a device by which one hopes to secure understanding, not a claim that such powers exist as self-contained psychological units in the soul each separately putting out effects which, by intermingling, produce the final result. The *basic* unit still remains the active life of man. (Dent 1984, 3).

When the natural (according to a thing's nature) potential is directed towards the good through feelings and desires which make up one's disposition, one's choices are moral. (NE:11:1). When directed inappropriately, i.e. not towards the good, it is evil. Not all virtues or vices possess the same overall structure. Desires are rational when based on one's judgement of good and evil. (ibid.). Though virtues of character are acquired from habitual practice and intellectual virtues through rational exercise, the two kinds are yet closely related. We gradually transform our *anima naturaliter* or inherent dispositions *kata ton orthon logon*, which MacIntyre translates as according to right reason. Ross' translation, "in accordance with the right rule", is misleading, says MacIntyre (1981, 152, 154). In Aristotle's words:

Thus in one word, states of character arise out of like activities. This is why the activities we exhibit must be of a certain kind; it is because the states of character correspond to the differences between these [activities]. It makes no small difference, then, whether we form habits of one kind or another from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather all the difference. (NE. 2:1)

Aristotle believed that what Simon calls *existential readiness* is developed gradually and, as stated above, only an adult or mature person can possess it to a high degree. (cf.: Kenny 1989, 83-85).

### III. DOES *HEXIS* MEAN MORE THAN DISPOSITION?

Since *hexis* has such a unique meaning in Aristotle, D.S. Hutchinson in his book, *The Virtues of Aristotle* (1986, 7), leaves the word untranslated. He thinks that *disposition* is not an adequate rendering of *hexis*. Hutchinson's treatment of the subject is based on a number of Aristotle's works, not only the *Nicomachean Ethics* solely referred to by many writers when discussing Aristotelian ethics. According to Hutchinson, NE contains only the main point of Aristotle's "extensive and sophisticated doctrine of virtue", parts of which are expressed or implied in different works by him. Anthony Kenny (ibid., 54, 57) has argued that it is in the *Eudemian Ethics* that Aristotle's mature position is to be found and that arguments in EE and NE are not necessarily consistent. Hutchinson's discussion helps to clarify also the relationship of terms such as virtues, character, feelings, dispositions, choices etc. among themselves, and to *hexis*. In what follows, I shall follow mainly Hutchinson's argument. In the NE II 5, Aristotle says that because virtue is neither a capacity nor a feeling, it is a *hexis*. In the same section, Aristotle also says: "By *hexis* I mean those things in virtue of which we are in a good or

bad condition with respect to the feelings.”

Hutchinson considers the above statement parallels EE: II 2, which he translates as follows:

Hexis is a special sort of disposition, which is itself a quality: it is special by being especially well entrenched in the thing of which it is a hexis. A hexis is either an excellence or an aberration; an excellence is a hexis which is a perfection, and something is perfect when it is most in accordance with its nature (Hutchinson, 5).

That a hexis is either an excellence or an aberration calls attention to the fact that the psychological components of one’s inner state, in a context, may be well or badly *disposed*. The components disposed in an order that is not consistent with man’s rational nature generates vice. In NE (1129a 6-10), Aristotle makes clear that a *single* hexis of character (as distinguished from rational or intellectual hexis) does not produce, for instance, both just and unjust results. From a hexis of arete or virtue, one is *able* to do what is just, *does* what is just, and *wish* for what is just; the hexis of one who acts unjustly and wishes for what is unjust cannot be the same. As Mary Midgely says:

Emotionally we are capable of [these] vices, because we are capable of states opposite to them, namely the virtues, and these virtues would be unreal if they did not have an opposite alternative. The vices are the defects of our qualities. Our nature provides for both. If it did not, we should not be free. (1984, 3; cf.: Rackham 1981, 484-503)

Midgely later adds:

... the existence of inborn tendencies to evil need not puzzle us too much. It only means that our good tendencies are not complete or infallible, that we are not faultless automata. (ibid., 14).

For Hutchinson, Aristotle's *hexis* is a state which directs our feelings and desires in a situation, and thus influence our choices. Desires may be rational. A *hexis* may include "elements such as feeling, desires, purposes as well as reason for acting in one way rather than another and the inter-relatedness of the elements may vary for different virtues (Dent 1981, 15). Or we may say that our "subjective motivational set" (Williams 1981, p102) will influence our desires and feelings in different situations. If one's subjective motivational set is a well-entrenched disposition, it is a *hexis* that cause to have feelings reasonably or unreasonably. Aristotle states (EE II 2:20): "States of character are the states that cause the emotions to be present either rationally or the opposite: for example, courage, sobriety of mind, cowardice, profligacy".

Cognitive psychologist, Steven Pinker, uses a different terminology:

The upshot is that an urge or habit coming out of one module can be translated into behaviour in different ways — or suppressed altogether — by some other module. To take a simple example, cognitive psychologists believe that a module called "habit system" underlies our tendency to produce certain responses habitually, such as responding to a printed word by pronouncing it silently. But another module, called "the supervisory attention system" can override it ... In this way the theory of human nature coming out of the cognitive revolution has more in common with the Judeo-Christian theory of human nature ... than with behaviorism, social constructionism and other versions of the Blank Slate. Behaviour is not just emitted or elicited, nor does it come directly out of culture and society. It comes from an internal struggle among mental modules with different agendas and goals. (Pinker 2002, 40).

Feelings (Hutchinson, 118) are specific desires in response to the situations that the agent perceive himself in. Hutchinson cites (ibid.) Fortenbaugh (*Aristotle on the Emotions*, 1975) that the agent's perception may be mistaken and cause feelings to be mistaken or to occur unreasonably. In his *Categories*, Aristotle states that a virtue is a hexis of character, and granted that it has to do with feelings, it should also be recognized that all hexeis are also dispositions of character of particular virtues and vices. A hexis differs from a (mere) disposition by being more stable and longer lasting. (Categ., 8b 27-28). Such *confirmation* of dispositions cannot be achieved by a young person all by himself, even if he has been free from what might have misdirected his natural potential.

It seems, therefore, that there are mere *dispositions* for feelings, different from hexeis for feelings, even though in the *ergon* argument in EE Aristotle often uses the terms interchangeably (EE, e.g. 121 8b:38; 121 9a 11-13, a 31-33). To quote EE. 1220a 30: “Virtue, therefore, is that sort of disposition which is produced by the best processes to do with the soul.” Yet in the succeeding chapter only hexeis (special kind of disposition) and capacities qualify as virtues of character. Why exclude the mere dispositions here? The likely explanation, according to Hutchinson, is that in the latter chapter Aristotle is discussing traits of character which are developed by long training, not temporary states as dispositions could be. Therefore, character traits are not mere dispositions, but hexeis. In *Metaphysics* (Chapter 8), Aristotle says that in comparison to mere dispositions, hexeis are hard to change, longer lasting, more stable, and permanent — *all* tantamount to one differentia distinguishing hexeis from *mere* dispositions. This tallies with our experience: we speak of a person who acts now one way and now another as not having his character formed. Also, at least in maturity, people seem to have relatively stable character traits. Short-term dispositions do not therefore relate to traits of character. Richard Brandt, in his “Traits of Character: a

conceptual analysis” (1970), endorses this:

Traits of character are relatively permanent features of a person... There is none of the trait names of interest to us which we would apply to a person in virtue of some relatively unstable and temporary features (27; cf. Kuperman 1985, 229).

Granted that *hexeis* are stable and long-lasting dispositions, we must still speak of the development of dispositions of character in the young, for only on the basis of dispositions can *hexeis* be built.

#### IV HOW CAN HEXEIS OF VIRTUES BE DEVELOPED?

There is of course more than one theory abroad as to how character (Simon uses the term: dependability) desirable for the sake of individual happiness as well as for social peace can be best achieved. A.B.C. Duncan says:

Many young people today find life unnecessarily difficult and complex precisely because they lack the habits of action which would free them to think more deeply about more important issues (Cochrane 1979, 9).

Aristotle saw *hexis* as a compound product of nature, habit and reason, achieved by an appropriate disposing of personal inclinations and qualities. Plato is emphatic that the social order is a unique issue of one and the many, that for the harmonious working of community or society, there has to be harmony not only among the many but also within each individual. In the *Republic*, justice within the individual is reflected in the State and vice versa. The personal whole needs to be set in order no less than the social whole; individual moral character as well as the form of the community or of the State-regime should both be attended to. To do this we do not need to accept Plato’s tripartite

psychology of the individual soul. Bernard Williams thinks (2002) that Diderot did a great service in questioning Plato's unsubtle reason - will - emotion distinction and making us suspicious of the belief-desire model of human agency. Diderot saw the moral agent in proto-Freudian terms as "awash with many images, many excitements, merging fears and fantasies that dissolve into one another." (Williams, quoted by Rorty 2002, 15) Williams would however agree with both Plato and Aristotle that out of this convoluted self one needs to construct, in Aristotelian terms, a hexis *worthy* to be true to — rather than, as Rousseau thought, accept passively — an existent self transparent to itself.

Mary Midgley condemns (1984, 15) the prevalent notion that wrong-doing be explained by solely external causes. To quote:

The natural method of investigation is ... to study directly the forms of inner conflict involved in temptation — the warring motives that take part in this conflict, especially those which actually tend towards evil — and the relationship between this turbulent process and our personal identify (69)

She says:

[This] study, however, involves using a notion of our motives as natural, which has at times been strongly denounced in the Social Sciences, though that denunciation is much less confident and unanimous than it used to be (68).

Unlike Emerson, Rousseau or the psycho-technologists of today, neither Aristotle nor the philosophers up to the Enlightenment believed that character or virtue was an easy achievement; it did not come naturally. Locke's educational injunction is:

Teach him to get a Mastery of over his inclinations, and submit his appetite to Reason ... Our first actions being guided more by Self-Love than Reason or Reflection, 'tis no wonder that in Children they should be very apt to deviate from just measures of Right and Wrong which are in the mind the result of Improved Reason and Serious Meditation. (Axtell 1968, 314).

But are reason and reflection a sufficient basis for character? In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke says:

...yet upon a stricter enquiry, that good, the greater good, though apprehended and acknowledged to be so, does not determine the will, until our desire, raised proportionably to it makes us uneasy in the want of it.” (Ch.II)

Was Locke influenced by the letter his friend Thomas Burton had written to him? Burton wrote:

Virtues and Vices are not like a Theorem which we come to know by the help of precedent Demonstrations and Postulations, but rises (sic) as quick as any of our Passions, as laughter at the sight of a ridiculous Accident or Object. (Spellman 1987, 480)

Victorian focus on the subjugation of the will, drill and discipline for character formation was not Lockean — nor Aristotelian (Levine 2002). For a balanced perspective, a comparison with *dispositio* in its use in the ancient *rhetorical* context is salutary. Quintilian, the famous first century teacher of *Rhetoric*, suggests that in arranging *dispositio* or plan of a speech one cannot always stick to precise rules because every case in law courts is different and therefore one must rely more on judgment and ingenuity, rather than follow rules blindly Quintilian says that “the all-important gift of an orator is to respond to change and variety in things.” Though it is



true that character represents orientation of the self to certain ends or vision, yet rules, — “specific regimented actions in the spirit of command and obedience” — are indispensable for character formation. Quintilian, like Cicero before him, laid down *rules* also (Lubbock 2002, 40-41) for the formation of an orator.

Character is closely related to virtues according to Aristotle and Aquinas. The integrity of the moral agent accounts for the consistency of his behaviour. Virtues refer more to specific traits such as honesty or kindness.

Having character — as distinguished from having specified character traits — signifies a more fundamental moral determination of self than do the virtues. (Hauerwas 1975, 14-16).

According to David Carr (1985), there are “Two Kinds of Virtues: virtues of attachment and virtues of self-control.” Locke’s statement in the *Essay*... that our desires need to be raised in proportion to the nature of the action in question than that they be controlled parallels Carr’s differentia for virtues of attachment:

The point of crucial importance: .. an emotion or passion or feeling is just as important a feature of a virtue of attachment as [for] a virtue of self-control, it is not in the former case engaged in a struggle with reason but is joined in alliance with it ... whereas in the case of virtues of self-control passion is related only externally to reason, passion and reason are related internally in the case of virtues of attachment. (54).

Carr suspects that Von Wrights’ inclination (in his *The Varieties of Goodness*, 1963) towards a general account of virtues in terms of self-control — the classic conflict between reason and passion — is a vestigial remnant of the Kantian influence he claimed to have emancipated himself from.

In studying inner conflicts, the best pedagogic medium is narrative, especially literature. Luntley seems to be endorsing this (1995, 36):

It would be fair to say that moral philosophy has taken a narrative turn of late. The brash demand for regimental codes for living well has given way to a much more nuanced description of the contours of moral life and the teasing out of the operation of a less character — regimented and more phenomenologically — responsive articulation of moral experience.

For Stanley Hauerwas (1981) and Alasdair MacIntyre (1981), a specific account of virtues presupposes and is best displayed in narrative accounts of the structure and the unity of worthwhile human life. (Barbour 1983, 175-182 ; cf.: Barbour 1989, 298-299). MacIntyre observes that we necessarily find ourselves part of a story that has already been begun, playing “roles into which we have been drafted.” (Kilpatrick 1992, 205). Often, such literature is not hagiography, but presents life that falls short of human virtues. This lends to a better understanding of the human condition with its *temptations* and *inner conflicts* that Midgley speaks of. Understanding the possibility of tragic conflicts (something very different from reasoning about moral issues) also enables one to see the need for seeing a human life as a whole and avoid subjective arbitrariness. These thinkers rightly stress that many aspects of moral life are a matter of imaginative vision and of understanding one’s own life by analogy to classic narratives. What they have in common with Aristotle is that qualities of character are socio-teleological, related to life in a community. To quote Kilpatrick (ibid.):

When the narrative sense is absent from individual lives, society also suffers from impoverishment. Both for society and the individual the loss of story and history amounts to a loss of memory. We become amnesiacs, not knowing where we are going, because we don't know where we have come from, and — for the same reason — susceptible to the most superficial attractions.

## REFERENCES

Aristotle. *Eudemian Ethics*.

Aristotle. *Categoies*

Aristotle. *Metaphysics*

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*

Axtell, James. (ed.) 1968. *Some Thoughts Concerning Education in The Educational Writings of John Locke* . Cambridge University Press.

Barbour, John D. 1983 & 1989. “The Virtues in a Pluralistic Context.” in *The Journal of Religion*. Vol. 63, No 2, & a review of Paul Nelson .1987. *Narrative and Morality: A Theological Inquiry in T he Journal of Religion*. Vol. 69, No.2

Barnes, Jonathan. 1982. *Aristotle*. Past Masters, Oxford University Press.

Brandt, Richard. 1970. “Traits of Character: A Conceptual Analysis.” in *American Philosophical Quarterly*. Vol. 7

Burnyeat, M.F. 1987. WITTGENSTEIN AND AUGUSTINE DE MAGISTRO in *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume LXI*

Carr, David. 1 985. “Two Kinds of Virtue” in *Aristotelian Society* Proceedings, Vol. LXXXV

Carr, Wilfrid. 1987. “What is an Educational Practice” in *Journal of Philosophy of Education* Vol. 21, No. 2

Cochrane, D.B. et al. (eds.) 1979. *The Domain of Moral Education*. Paulist Press

Cohen, Brenda. 1983. “ Positive Values ” in *The Aristotelian Society Supplementary Vol.* LVII

Cooper, David. E. 1987. “Practice, Philosophy and History: Carr vs Jonathan” in *Journal of Philosophy of Education* (Vol.21, No.2).

Crisp, Roger. 1988. “The Master of Those Who Know” a review of Jonathan Lear’s *ARISTOTLE: The Desire To Know*. 1988, in *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, April 15, p.17.

Dent, N.J 1984. *The Moral Psychology of Virtues*. Cambridge Studies in Philosophy

Fortenbaugh, W.W. 1975. *Aristotle on Emotion..* London: Duckworth.

Goodman, Lenn E. 1987. “Determinism and Freedom in Spinoza, Maimonides, and Aristotle: A Retrospective Study” in *Responsibility, Character and Emotions: New Essays in Moral Psychology*. Cambridge University Press.

Hauerwas, Stanley.1975. *Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics*. San Antonio, Texas: Trinity University Press

Hauerwas, Stanley. 1981. *A Community of Character: Towards a Construction of Social Ethic*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dane Press.

- Hutchinson, D.S. 1986. *The Virtues of Aristotle*. Routledge & Kegan Paul
- Kenny, Anthony. 1989. *The Metaphysical Mind*. Oxford University Press
- Kilpatrick, William. 1992. *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right from Wrong: And What We Can Do About It*. Simon and Schuster: A Touchstone Book
- Kohlberg, Lawrence, ed. 1981. *The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice*. San Francisco: Harper & Row
- Kuperman, Joel. 1985, "Character and Self -Knowledge" in *The Aristotelian Society Proceedings, Vol. LXXXV*.
- Lear, Jonathan. 1988. *Aristotle and the desire to understand*. Cambridge U. Press.
- Levine, George. 2002. *Dying to Know: Scientific Epistemology and Narrative in Victorian England*. University of Chicago Press
- Locke, John. 1690. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.
- Louden, Robert B. 1992. *Morality and Moral Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lubbock, Jules. 2002. "The First Universal Man" in *London Review of Books: Vol.24, No. 21*
- Luntley, Michael. 1995. "Moral Sentiments and the Difference They Make" in *The Aristotelian Society : Supplementary Volume LXIX*
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. 1981. *After Virtue* University of Notre Dame Press
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. 1990. *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia Genealogy and Tradition*. University of Notre Dame Press
- McKeon, Richard. 1978. "Philosophy and Theology, History and Science in the Thought of Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas" in *The Journal of Religion , Vol. 58 : Celebrating the Medieval Heritage: A Colloquy on the Thought of Aquinas and Bonaventure*. ed. by David Tracy
- Midgley, Mary. 1984. *WICKEDNESS: A Philosophical Essay*. London: ARK PAPERBACKS.
- Murdoch, Iris. 1970. *The Sovereignty of Good*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul
- Pegis, Anton C. (ed.) 1948. *Introduction to ST. THOMAS AQUINAS* New York: Modern Library.
- Peters, R.S. 1974. Ch 13: "Reason and Habit: The Paradox of Moral Development" in *Psychology and Moral Development*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Pinker, Steven. 2002. *THE BLANK SLATE: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*. Viking.
- Rackham, H. transl. 1981. *Aristotle: Vol. XX*. Harvard University Press.
- Rorty, Richard. 2002. Review of *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy* by Bernard Williams (2002) in *London Review of Books, 24:21*.
- Ross, David. 1980. translation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Oxford University Press.
- Sherman, Nancy. 1997. *Making a Necessity of Virtue: Aristotle and Kant on Virtue*. Cambridge University Press.

Simon, Yves R. ed. by Vukan Kuic. 1986. *The Definition of Moral Virtue*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Sorrell, Tom. 2000. *Moral Theory and Anomaly*. Blackwell.

Spellman, W.M. 1987. "The Christian Estimate of Man in Locke's *Essay*", in *The Journal of Religion*. Vol. 67, No. 4.

Taylor, Charles. 1985. "Philosophy and its History" in *Philosophy in History* (ed. by Rorty, Richard et al.) Cambridge University Press.

Urmson, J.O. 1988. *Aristotle's Ethics*. Basil Blackwell.

Von Wright, G.H. 1963. *Varieties of Goodness*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Williams, Bernard. 1981. *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973 -1980*. Cambridge University Press.

Williams, Bernard. 1985. *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. Harvard University Press.

Williams, Bernard. (2002). "Why Philosophy Needs History" in *London Review of Books*, Vol. 24: No.20.

---

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Note: Though not directly related to the point above, it may be said that Kohlberg's assumptions on the foundation of morality are akin to the Socratic " Knowledge is Virtue." (Cohen 1983,31; Barbour 1983, 181-182).

Copyright © 2003 Minerva.

All rights are reserved, but fair and good faith use with full attribution may be made of this work for educational or scholarly purposes.

---

---

**Joseph Malikail is Professor Emeritus, University of Regina, Canada. He is active in the International Society for the Study of Human Ideas on Ultimate Reality and Meaning (ISSHIURAM), and is on its board of directors.**