# THE ADVANTAGES OF MORAL DIVERSITY*

## By Amélie Oksenberg Rorty

> Those who are careful, fair and conservative—those of a moderate
> temperament—are not keen; they lack a certain sort of quick active
> boldness. The courageous on the other hand are far less just and cau-
> tious, but they are excellent at getting things done. A community can
> never function well . . . unless both of these are present and ac-
> tive . . . woven together by the ruler.
> Plato, *The Statesman*, 311B–C (my translation).

We are well served, both practically and morally, by ethical diversity,
by living in a community whose members have values and priorities that
are, at a habit-forming, action-guiding level, often different from our own.
Of course, unchecked ethical diversity can lead to disaster, to chaos and
conflict. We attempt to avoid or mitigate such conflict by articulating gen-
eral moral and political principles, and developing the virtues of acting
on those principles. But as far as leading a good life—the life that best
suits what is best in us—goes, it is not essential that we agree on the in-
terpretations of those common principles, or that we are committed to
them, by some general act of the will. What matters is that they form our
habits and institutions, so that we succeed in cooperating practically, to
promote the state of affairs that realizes what we each prize. People of dif-
ferent ethical orientations can—and need to—cooperate fruitfully in prac-
tical life while having different interpretations and justifications of general
moral or procedural principles. Indeed, at least some principles are best
left ambiguous, and some crucial moral and ethical conflicts are best un-
derstood, and best arbitrated, as failures of practical cooperation rather
than as disagreements about the truth of certain general propositions or
theories.

This way of construing ethical conflict and cooperation carries political
consequences. It appears to make the task of resolving ethical conflicts
more modest and, perhaps, easier to accomplish. But it raises formidable
problems about how to design the range of educative institutions that
bridge public and private life.

I

A few terminological remarks and boundary signposts are in order.

The advantages of diversity accrue from cooperation or, at any rate, from the coordination of activities that are central to a person's ethical projects. We can distinguish three layers of ethical worth:

1. Acting in accordance with the minimal *ethics of righteousness* involves attentive care to avoid doing wrong or violating ethical or moral principles (whatever these may turn out to be). To be bound by the (negative) obligations of the ethics of righteousness, a person requires only minimal talents or skills: the capacity to understand what is forbidden, to recognize instances of it, and to resist its lure. Although the ethics of righteousness is egalitarian in assuming that nearly everyone possesses the capacities required to lead an ethical life, it is compatible with an indefinite number of specific substantive views about the criteria for determining what is unrighteous. For instance, the ethics of righteousness can rest on a system of revealed theology, on a theory of human nature, or on one of natural law. Moreover, it does not specify its domain; that is, it does not tell us whether (for instance) what is forbidden includes certain types of thoughts and motives as well as certain actions. It is the ethics of righteousness that gives play to the philosophical postulates of the will, as the faculty of choice and of effort.

2. Acting in accordance with the minimal *ethics of decency* involves making a serious attempt to fulfill positive moral obligations and to do so for morally appropriate reasons. Like the ethics of righteousness, the ethics of decency is compatible with a wide range of substantive theories. Even when its commands are few and general (for example, "Love God and do His Will"), it typically casts a much wider net of obligations than does the ethics of righteousness, and the fulfillment of these obligations requires a wide range of capacities and abilities. Still, for all of that, the ethics of decency is, within a variable range, also typically roughly egalitarian: the assumption is that virtually every human being is bound by these obligations because virtually any human being is capable of fulfilling them.

Although remaining righteous or achieving decency are, particularly in hard times, no mean accomplishments, the point of ethics extends beyond successfully passing the court of righteousness, or having a decent, "good enough" character. After all, a cheap and easy way to be righteous is to remain minimalist, intending little so that one can intend clean. And while the ethics of decency is often admirable, it is rarely generative. It concentrates on being good, rather than on promoting the good. Although they may be appropriately legislative, providing a minimum level of guidance, the ethics of righteousness and of decency cannot, by themselves, be robustly executive. They do not assure the development of the range of abilities and habits of cooperation required for the pursuit of ethical projects.

3. The robust, substantive *ethics of virtue* leaves the world a better place for our activity, going beyond the contribution that might be made by the sheer existence of one more righteous or decent person. To follow the ethics of virtue is to be beneficent, to move inventively towards achieving the end of morality, whatever it may be. The ethics of virtue supplements and fulfills righteousness and decency. Our ethical character — the manner and tone of our presence in what we do — is an essential part of what we do. (Consider a parallel: In principle, the general capacity for avoiding logical errors and fallacies is the minimal qualification for rationality. But however active and acute that capacity may be, possession of it does not assure that a person will be able to generate sound, reasonable inferences. Still less does it assure that he will have the ability to think creatively and fruitfully — which, after all, is the point of being rational.)

From the point of view of the ethics of righteousness and of decency, the beneficent ethics of virtue seems supererogatory, and, indeed, compliance with it is not universally obligatory. The ethics of virtue is not self-imposed as a command or as a duty, but as a guide that must be followed, on pain of loss or shame. Since the capacities, abilities and talents required for following the ethics of virtue are complex and varied, and since the circumstances that promote their development and exercise are contingent, not everyone is equally capable of the ethics of virtue. While the ethics of virtue normally encompasses and fulfills the ethics of righteousness and decency, it can in certain sorts of circumstances come into conflict with them.[1] It might, for instance, sometimes only be possible to achieve some great good by violating an obligation of decency (for example, honesty or loyalty). To deal with such cases, many virtue theories introduce a variant of *phronesis* or practical wisdom as central to ethical character. The role of practical wisdom is to determine when it is ethically appropriate to set aside the dictates of righteousness or decency.

We can distinguish: *ethical character, moral systems, philosophical theories of morality*, and *meta-ethical theories*.[2] Briefly, a person's *ethical character* is a relatively stable configuration of deeply entrenched and widely ramified traits and dispositions of perception, cognition, emotion and motivation, and behavior, as these might systematically vary with circumstance and situation.[3] Patterns of perceptual and emotional attention and sali-

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[1] Compare Michael Walzer, "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 2, no. 2 (Winter 1973).

[2] "Ethics" derives from the Greek *ethos*: habit, accustomed way of doing things. It is a form of the verb *etho*, generally used to indicate that the action designated by a conjoined verb is habitual, frequent, or customary. "Morality" derives from the Latin *mos, moris*, used by Cicero to refer to traditional or ancestral ways of doing things.

[3] I shall stay with an old-fashioned terminology, parasitically relying on others to provide useful analyses of *dispositions, habits*, and *patterns of salience*. Contemporary classifications of personality types are latter-day descendants of classical theories of the humors or temperaments. See Theophrastus, *Characters* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1967); Robert Burton, *The*

ence, patterns and styles of cognitive and motivational organization, habits of social interaction, and typical strategies for coping with conflict often explain — and sometimes are also ingredient in — the structure of a person's beliefs and desires, as they affect choice and action. Traits are individuated by their functional roles; the attribution of character traits is both theory-laden and descriptive. Character traits are layered and often interactive: they include constitutional traits (those, for instance, that might affect perceptual thresholds and emotional lability); socially acquired dispositions; second-order evaluations of first-order traits, including attitudes towards character integration; active principles and ideals of conduct.[4] Many traits — friendliness, persistence, ingenuity, envy, distrust — are themselves clusters of cognitive-and-behavioral dispositions that are magnetizing and sometimes self-activating.[5] They do not depend solely on the chance of circumstance to elicit them: the cognitive dimension of such traits structure a person's interpretations of situations in such a way as to elicit a typical self-sustaining response.[6] There is a good deal of individual variation in the extent to which character traits form an integrated system, and in the capacity to tolerate failures of integration.

The directions of a person's ethical character traits can be articulated as (what has come to be called) her "conception of the good," or as a set of rules and principles that she endorses or affirms, much as she might affirm the truth of some propositions. But even when we are working at our best to do our best, we rarely form our actions by deriving them from general ideals and principles, following a reconstructed model of practical reasoning. When these ideals or principles are constitutive as well as regulative — when they form the cognitive core of a person's habits — they can be described as *values*; but when they are ritualized and rhetorical expressions of the directions that a person might notionally wish to follow, they are more properly considered *ideology*.[7] The difference between the

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*Anatomy of Melancholy* (New York: Vintage, 1977); Samuel Butler, *Characters* (Cleveland: Case Western University Press, 1970); Jerome Kagan, *Unstable Ideas, Temperament, Cognition, and the Self* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); and Owen Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personalities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

[4] Compare Amélie Rorty and David Wong, "Aspects of Identity and Agency," in *Identity, Character, and Morality*, ed. Owen Flanagan and Amélie Rorty (Cambridge: MIT, 1990).

[5] Compare Amélie Rorty, "Two Faces of Courage" and "Virtues and Their Vicissitudes," in *Mind in Action* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), esp. pp. 301-2, 316-17.

[6] For instance, an aggressive person tends to see the behavior of others as oppositional, and to do so in a way that elicits her own confrontational responses. Similarly, someone attentive to issues of power need not want it for herself: she might, for instance, be an egalitarian obsessed with overcoming existing power structures. Still, whatever her principal commitments may be, the realization of her other values will be affected by her sensitivity to issues of power.

[7] To call ideological commitments and avowals "rhetorical" is not to belittle or mock them. It is, after all, *something* for a person to exhort herself to act on a certain principle or ideal, to recognize failures, and to attempt to correct and make some restitution for the harms they bring. Ethical conflict is, after all, sometimes an advance over unconflicted vice: like hypocrisy, ethical conflict can sometimes represent the homage that vice renders to virtue.

two is marked by the extent and the manner in which principles or ethical ideals habitually form action. Unless the rhetoric of self-exhortation moves from programs of self-reform and damage control to developing and exercising appropriate well-integrated habits, it is an ethical principle only by an extension of courtesy to the ideals that might stand behind, and explain, conflicted behavior.

*Moral systems* are practice-oriented imperative answers to the question "How should we live?": they are normative directives for producing certain types of persons, with specific sorts of mentalities and modes of action, who will attempt to affect the world in certain ways. Most moral systems are multifaceted: they address problems of the compossible realization of ethical projects; they set priorities among aims and provide principles for coordinating a range of primary ideals and values. For some moral systems, what matters is that individual human beings realize an aim or perfection essential to their natures; for others, what matters is that the world — either the social world or, more grandly, the world as whole — achieve a specific aim or form; yet others are focused on characterizing what is right and just. While they presuppose a theory about what is best and worst in human nature, they are focused on the practical problems of how to bypass or transform the worst to develop the best. Moral systems that are primarily focused on norms for social life also present guidelines for promoting cooperation among the various ideals and values of their members. A community's moral system is the configuration of norms and values — often organized in a dynamic system of checks and balances — that are expressed in its institutional structures, and in its practices of praise and blame, rewards and sanctions. Because the directions of a community's moral system profoundly affect, but do not wholly determine, the ethical directions of its members, they often provide sources of moral conflict.[8] And since most communities are historically layered and diverse, archeologically composed of distinct subcommunities, their internal complexity and division set the stage for negotiation (and sometimes the downright opposition) among a range of moral systems, each attempting to define a dominant configuration of ethical projects.

The principles that are implicit in systems of morality can, but need not, be articulated; they can, but need not, be systematized and justified in a *philosophical theory of morality*. Philosophical theories of morality are in a way Janus-faced. As addressed to their contemporaries, they focus on historically and contextually specific problems; they inherit a philosophic idiom and a range of methodological assumptions. But they also typically attempt to abstract from their origins and conditions, to present what they take to be universally valid arguments for a set of norms, principles, or ideals.

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[8] Compare Rorty and Wong, "Aspects of Identity and Agency."

Not surprisingly, many philosophical theories of morality strive for completeness by developing a *meta-ethical theory* about the ontological status of moral values, the interrelations among primary moral terms, and the criteria for valid moral arguments. But there is no one-to-one correlation between philosophical theories of morality and meta-ethical theories: in principle, distinct moral systems might have the same meta-ethical theory, and vice versa.

It should be clear that neither ethical nor moral differences coincide with cultural differences, with ethnic, religious, racial, or class differences. Even when they promote or privilege a range of ideal types — or, more, likely, stereotypes — cultures are not, at a policy- and action-guiding level, ethically or morally homogeneous. Lacking the kind of variety in focus and in action-guiding priorities that most problem solving requires, a homogeneous culture would have great difficulty managing its practical affairs. Moreover, a community's blend of cultural differences is a matter of the historical accidents of wars, famines, and labor migrations. It would be a matter of remarkable, even freakish historical luck if the events that formed a community's cultural mix happened to coincide with the range of ethical and moral directions that its situation required. Nor do cultural differences necessarily coincide with moral differences. Although cultures tend to moralize their mores when they are confronted or threatened, distinct cultures can have similar moral systems, similar solutions to the problems of coordinating ethical diversity; and similar cultures can, in principle, accept distinct moral systems.

## II

With these boundary signposts and terminological strategies in place, let us return to the main lines of our discussion. To convince you of the advantages of ethical diversity, I shall try to remind you of what I think you already believe.

First, despite their nominally having the same general principles and some of the same general virtues, distinct ethical types — distinct character structures — tend, other things being equal, to have at least some significantly different action-guiding agendas, priorities, and values. And, contrariwise, the distinctive agendas of different moral systems are best realized by distinct ethical types.

Second, although there are many circumstances in which they conflict on practical issues, each ethical type depends on the functioning of the others for its own best fulfillment.

Third, the mutually constructive cooperation of distinct ethical types does not depend on their agreeing on unambiguous general moral principles, or on their having the same interpretations of principles of justice. Nor does it depend on their being committed to a set of general attitudes,

to mutual respect, *caritas*, or trust. It depends rather on their developing the active detailed habits that are the substance of those general attitudes.

### Different character types, different values

Anyone who is capable of substantive, robust morality—a morality that goes beyond that of righteousness or decency—has, at a minimal level, a suitable configuration of the central virtues required for responsible action, the overlapping virtues that typically span those projected by various moral systems.[9] And the ideal ethical person might indeed have the wide range of traits that constitute the virtues, always appropriately balanced as the situation requires. But even if there were a possible world in which we were all capable of being ideal ethical agents, it does not seem to be ours. Somewhere in between the minimal and the ideal ethical agent, there stand the vast majority of us, who are pretty good at some sorts of things and not so good at others. Beyond the minimal level required for standard-issue responsibility, ethical character tends to specialize.[10]

A person is, by character, primarily egalitarian or hierarchical; she follows, coordinates, or claims authority; she is compliant, conciliatory, or oppositional; obsessed with issues of justice and entitlement, with high excellence, or with beneficence and welfare. To be sure, different types of situations tend to elicit distinct traits. An intervener at the office can be an observer at home, suspicious of those she regards as inferiors, yet trustful towards those she considers equals; she is sensitive to issues of justice among strangers and to those of *caritas* among friends. The cluster of traits that constitutes a person's ethical character are subscripted for the sorts of situations in which they typically function. But the traits that form a person's character, appropriately subscripted, tend to cluster in patterns of mutual dependence and exclusion. Their cognitive components stand in logical relations of presupposition, entailment, and contrariety. More commonly, they are psychologically associated in patterns of mutual enhancement, modification, and inhibition. Some traits— friendliness and trust, for instance—reinforce one another. But the actions that are the standard expressions of traits can also typically undermine or

[9] Compare Amélie Rorty, "Solomon and Everyman: A Problem in Conflicting Moral Intuitions," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 3 (1991).

[10] Compare Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), for distinctions among relatively autonomous strategies and competencies. Jerry Fodor distinguishes general-purpose from modular, context-specific processors and faculties; see his *Modularity of the Mind* (Cambridge: MIT/Bradford, 1983). But there are also studies of patterns of correlation among traits: see Theodore Adorno, *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper, 1950); and Roger Brown, *Social Psychology* (New York: Free Press, 1965). For critiques of personality theories, see Walter Mischel, *Personality and Assessment* (New York: Wiley, 1968); H. Hartshorne and M. A. May, *Studies in the Nature of Character* (New York: Macmillan, 1928–30); and Owen Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personalities*, pp. 301–2, 316–17.

block one another's intended outcomes. Strong patriotic loyalty, for instance, tends to inhibit cross-cultural empathy. The configuration of traits that constitute a markedly just character is rarely significantly magnanimous; a cautious person is rarely trustful; the virtues of innocence are rarely retained in the virtues of experience.[11]

It is, of all people, Plato who introduces the argument that different psychological types have, at an action-guiding level, different ethical values. "The origin of the city," Socrates says in his discussion of the benefits of justice in Book II of *The Republic*, "is to be found in the fact that we do not severally suffice [to fulfill] our own needs" (369B, my translation). Socrates begins with examples from the division of labor that arises from distinct talents. "Our several natures are . . . different. One man is naturally fitted for one task, and another for another" (370B). After distinguishing types of natural abilities that promote the division of labor — the strength of a builder and the manual dexterity of a potter — Socrates moves to the differences between the psychological types central to the discussion in *The Republic*. He distinguishes the mentality, the abilities, and the action-guiding priorities of the merchant-shopkeeper, the military guardian, and the reflective philosopher who is concerned for "the common things" and who thinks holistically, "all-things-considered." Applying the benefits of the division of labor to the division of temperaments seems, on the face of it, an illicit, if not outrageously question-begging, Socratic strategy. But it is also a move which, like so many of those apparently illicit Socratic transitions, is carefully hedged. The division of labor is beneficial only when it is voluntary, and when it coincides with distinctions among psychological types, and vice versa (369B–371E). This neat fit between talent, occupation, preoccupation, and priorities is supposed to assure that each type will engage in activities that best and most happily express its "nature." Maintaining this fit is, as it turns out, one of the tasks, indeed one of the hallmarks, of what Plato considers a "well-ordered city."

However we may want, in the end, to detach ourselves from the political consequences that Plato draws from all this, he seems right about at least this much: whether we like it or not, longstanding occupational activities — particularly those that allow some latitude of choice and are relatively satisfying — form many habitual patterns of attention, focusing, and salience.[12] (In tracing the connections between the division of labor and ethical values, we can generalize to *types* of occupations and professions. For instance, the kinds of traits exercised in the manual crafts —

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[11] Compare Stuart Hampshire, *Innocence and Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

[12] For example: whatever their initial inclinations, urban policemen tend to become alertly suspicious of anything that might indicate criminal activity; even indifferent teachers acquire the habit of reading facial expressions of interest or boredom, puzzlement or disagreement; and city-planners become attentive to ways that spaces are defined and used.

making shoes or making pots — are interchangeable. Similarly, the talents and skills of persuasion are fungible: they can be exercised by a rhetorician, an advocate in the courts, or a businessman. To be sure, once specific skills are fully developed, once habits of mind and of action are strongly entrenched, it is not always easy to transfer them. Still, their contributions to common life are similar, and the life that suits one, suits the other.) Besides developing a characteristic range of dispositions and skills, occupations and crafts also tend to develop action-guiding — and sometimes also policy-guiding — preoccupations, interests, and values. Even when they disagree with one another on public policy, even when they did not enter military service through the main directions of their own characters, soldiers typically become focused on those political conditions that affect (what they perceive as) national security. It is their business to represent those interests in the formation of public policy.

Of course this is a gross, absurd, and even disgusting oversimplification. To begin with, there is no strict correlation between a person's occupation and her dispositions and interests. Despite a tendency for stereotypes to realize themselves — for to us become our own caricatures — most occupations and crafts require and promote a range of quite different types of traits, habits, and priorities. There are many different kinds of teachers, and many different ways of being a good teacher. Even more importantly, our abilities and habits — our interests and sense of what is important — are by no means solely formed by our occupations. They are also strongly formed by the patterns of our interactions with our friends and relations, and even by our interactions with our steady adversaries. Indeed, many people identify primarily with the traits that emerge in such interactions rather than with the habits that they acquire through their occupations, particularly since many occupations (especially those we tend to call "jobs") do not express or develop any particular sorts of character traits. Like professionals and artisans, those who work indifferently as store-clerks, bus drivers, short-order cooks, roofers, or temporary office assistants require cross-occupational traits like patience and reliability; but their work does not require, or tend to develop, a set of specific habits or interests. Moreover, as things stand, the contingencies that place a person in an occupation or in a set of social relations and roles — contingencies of socioeconomic class, of education, of opportunity — are by no means always connected to her character traits. Nor is there any reason to suppose that a person always gravitates to, or manages to find, the range of occupations or the roles that suit her temperament and talents. Still, for all of that, steady, occupational activities tend to develop preoccupations and interests, desires and preferences, independently of (and sometimes in conflict with) the rest of a person's traits and values. We need not be Platonists to think that Plato's laborers — the lumpen proletariat of their time — have specific objective interests by virtue of their work, their means of livelihood. It is, in a way, precisely because the habits we develop in our ordinary activities tend to form some

of our action-guiding values that we are so keen on the integration of our character traits. It is not only for the sake of greater efficiency, but also to avoid conflicts of interest that we try to integrate, or at least to coordinate, the habits and activities that constitute the daily routines of our occupations with those that emerge from our social roles, from our interactions with our families, friends, and adversaries. When our occupations and our social roles do not suit our temperaments, we suffer the debilities that attend conflicting desires, interests, and values.

Now for the other direction: *different values, different character types.* Differences in moral systems — as articulated in philosophical theories of morality — are most clearly and dramatically represented by differences in the psychology that each would attempt to develop. A moral system focused on the Christian cardinal virtues will, for instance, characterize a set of ideal moral agents who are markedly different from those projected by, and best suited to realize, a moral system directed to maximizing the greatest happiness of the greatest number; both differ from the character best suited to fulfill the projects of Kantian morality, acting from maxims that can be universalized, from a conception of what moral duty requires. If the classical moral philosophers were allowed to become moral educators, they would attempt to develop recognizably different types of character structures. To be sure, many moral philosophers — Plato, Aristotle, Hume — would not project just one ideal type: they would attempt to develop a range of specialized ethical characters. Still the range of ethical characters which Plato would promote is markedly distinguishable from those projected by Aristotle or Hume. Each would attempt to develop a distinctive set of social attitudes and relations — for instance, hierarchical or egalitarian — as well as a distinctive set of dispositions and skills. Even the mode, the stages, and the processes of their education would differ. Other things being equal, the ideal models projected by each moral system would enter situations from different perspectives, with a distinctive set of salient preoccupations. They would focus on different sorts of problems, recommend different kinds of strategies for solving them, and have different criteria for their successful resolution.

To convince you of this, I would like briefly to play at being Theophrastus, sketching a description of the ideal ethical model projected by several familiar traditional moral systems. As is the way of Theophrastean play, characterizations of this kind quickly, imperceptibly, become caricatures. My intention is not so much to present full descriptions of those distinct ethical types, as to suggest that the realization of distinct moral ideals requires distinct types of character structures.

Aristotle was himself his own best Theophrastus: he sketched the character of the *phronimos*, of the person of practical virtue, set to balance — and equipped to achieve — the excellences that are appropriate to each situation. The *phronimos* is the prototype of the Renaissance man: it is not enough that he has a sound, finely atuned capacity of judgment and prac-

tical reason, making the right decisions for the right reasons, or that he straightway sees and understands the best that can be made of situations as they present themselves. He must have a wide range of talents, habits, and skills — acquired by imitation and practice — to perform decisively rightly attuned actions. He must be something of a practical psychologist and rhetorician, easily able to persuade cooperation in civic life. Indeed, he must have the skills — the posture, the tone of voice, and the gestures — that are appropriate to each of the virtues. It is no good being courageous in battle if you are not a sound swordsman; it is no good being friendly if you do not have the many skills and graces that go into friendliness: the habits of listening well, with just the right level of attention and respect due to equals or inferiors. The virtues of the *phronimos* include reactive emotional dispositions: he is not only temperate but also indignant or angry in the right way, at the right time, and at the right things. But there are no rules, no maxims, and no algorithms for having the right passions, making the right decisions, or performing the appropriate actions.

Kant, too, was something of his own Theophrastus. In the *Lectures on Ethics* and *The Metaphysics of Virtue*, he describes and prescribes some of the virtues whose development would be commanded by the Good Will, delineating the preoccupations and habits of friendship, prudence, and self-respect. But it turns out that what matters for a person's ethical worth is not solely that he has the habits appropriate to each virtue, but whether, in acting from these habits, the maxims of his actions conform to the conditions set by the Good Will. Where an Aristotelian sees his friend as another self with whom he shares the primary activities of life, Kant sees friendship as involving an uneasy tension between the intimate confidentiality of affection and the reticent reserve that he regards as a mark of respect. Where an Aristotelian *phronimos* suits the rhetoric of persuasion to the character of his interlocutor, a Kantian would consider such forms of persuasion at best amoral, at worst a mark of disrespect for the rationality of an equal. Nothing makes the differences between a *phronimos* and the ethical character of a Kantian clearer than Kant's writing on moral education:

> Moral upbringing must [he says] be based on maxims. . . . The child should learn to act according to maxims, [rather than from] disciplined . . . habits. . . . [T]o form the characters . . . and to cultivate the understanding . . . of children, it is of the greatest importance to point out a certain plan and certain rules in everything, and these must be strictly adhered to. . . . The first step towards the formation of good character is to put our passions to one side. . . .[13]

[13] Immanuel Kant, *Education*, trans. Annette Churton (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), pp. 83–85, 96–97.

The model Kantian is concentrated on truthfulness, reliability, and steadfastness rather than on the kind of Aristotelian excellence that he would regard as mere virtuosity.

Playing Theophrastus in turn, Hume sketched the character traits of the Skeptic, the Platonist, the Stoic, and the Epicurean. Significantly, each of those essays are written from two perspectives, one expressing the views, preoccupations, and psychology of each position in its own voice, the other describing and analyzing the position and the character from the point of view of a judicious spectator.[14] The judicious spectator has a precise and well-informed sympathetic imagination, one that forms accurate ideas of the conditions, needs, and interests of his fellows. It is these, rather than an abstract faculty of rationality, that enable him to take, and to act from, the general point of view. Coordinating the various perspectives of his fellows, the judicious spectator of civil sensibility is capable of acting from principle-dependent desires. His precise and vivid sympathetic understanding of psychology has been developed by wide reading: novels, drama, and especially history have formed his imagination.

It should by now be easy to carry out the rest of the Theophrastean project of describing the distinctive characteristics of other major moral systems, their typical preoccupations and sensibilities, habits of the imagination, and primary cognitive categories. Each forms typical kinds of social attitudes and relations—egalitarian or hierarchical—is subject to typical kinds of conflicts, and has typical strategies for dealing with them. Each has typical failures and shortcomings, vices and views of vice. We could sketch more sympathetic portraits of utilitarian social planners than Dickens's devastating caricatures of Benthamite calculators. Indeed, Mill himself projected something of the character and the education of an ideal utilitarian, a social planner oriented to promoting public welfare, empirically well-informed and equipped to evaluate public policies by determining their risks, costs, and benefits. Even though Mill himself says that the ideal utilitarian will not only be directly motivated by the principle of utility, but will also act from the virtues of justice and "humanity," those classical virtues acquire a new direction and cast within a utilitarian framework.[15] Ironically, it is even possible to characterize the basic traits of Nietzsche's anti-character, the reliably anti-habitual, self-transcending, self-creating individual.[16]

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[14] In "A Dialogue," usually appended to the *Enquiries*, Hume ascribes differences in national character to differences in national experience, history, and geopolitical status. See David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 2nd ed., ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), pp. 334–35. "In a word," Hume says at the end of his essay on the Skeptic, "human life is governed more by fortune than by reason, and is more influenced by a particular humour than by general principles."

[15] John Stuart Mill, "On the Connection between Justice and Utility," in *Utilitarianism*, ed. James Smith and Ernest Sosa (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1969), pp. 82–83.

[16] Compare Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life As Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).

Theophrastean sketches tend to focus on distinguishing features. In doing so, they run the risk of describing a deeply etched, somewhat grotesque, stubborn version of each type. The best, if less idealized version of each type is more accommodating, ready to promote the civic virtues of mutual respect as well as the minute habits of coordination and cooperation that mutual respect brings. Still, despite their mutual respect and their attempts to incorporate a minimal level of one another's virtues, the ethical characters projected by different moral theories have distinctive habits and action-guiding priorities.

Most moral systems — and certainly most sophisticated philosophical theories of morality — also implicitly acknowledge one another's contributions: a fully fleshed Kantian would, for instance, reintroduce many (modified and reinterpreted) Aristotelian virtues. A sophisticated utilitarian attempts to incorporate the benefits of Humean civility and the duties of Kantian justice. Still, despite the overlap among their respective ideal types — despite their similarities and mutual acknowledgement — the characters projected by hybridized versions of traditional moral theories have distinct preoccupations and directions. For morality, it is not only the conjunction but also the primary configuration of traits that matters. At a fine-grain level, even hybridized versions of moral theories that agree on action-constraining principles, nevertheless also have distinct action-guiding priorities, policies, and habits.

### The advantages of diversity

There are several quite different sorts of considerations that argue for the advantages of maintaining and encouraging ethical diversity in its best, most developed forms. Since different considerations will convince different ethical types, it is best to offer a selection of different reasons. Those who are Platonists would be convinced by their own recollections of the arguments of *The Republic*. It is precisely because of the existence of ethical diversity, and because each type depends on the others to do their tasks, that it is necessary to construct institutions to assure the appropriate education of each type and to secure the satisfactory, satisfying coordination of all. While these institutions should promote agreement on certain general common ends, there is no presumption that each ethical type will understand those ends in the same way.

A less Platonic version of ethical diversity follows from the recognition that there are a number of distinct goods and ideals which do (and, we believe, should) direct us. Isaiah Berlin, Stuart Hampshire, and Charles Taylor have argued (each for somewhat different reasons) that a wide and diverse range of incommensurable values and ideals — *caritas*, integrity, justice, artistic creativity, equality, scientific inquiry, the preservation of individual liberty — constitute our historical identities. Because these values are implicit in virtually all our activities, we would have to change vir-

tually all our practices and institutions, if we attempted to abandon any of them. [17]

But the endless minute activities that constitute a life focused on fulfilling the ideals of liberty differ from those that are enjoined by a life devoted to *caritas* or to scientific inquiry. Indeed, the habits and activities required to achieve any one of these goods in a significantly successful way are not easily combined with highly developed forms of the habits and skills required to achieve the others. To be sure, an artist can also be just or, at any rate, can successfully avoid being unjust; and there are scholars capable of *caritas*. Moreover, a person can attempt to lead that sort of life which maintains and balances a wide range of these ideals without attempting to excel at any one of them. But the comprehensively balanced life represents yet another kind of ideal, one that is dependent on more focused and streamlined types.

These sorts of arguments for the benefits of ethical diversity also apply to the diversity of moral systems. It should not be surprising that ethical pluralism should be reflected in moral pluralism. Although most moral systems set themselves a number of distinct aims and tasks, [18] they tend to specialize, analyzing the relation between what is good and what is right, or giving an account of moral psychology, or characterizing a set of ideals. In developing norms for coordinating distinct ethical projects, moral systems typically propose distinct action-guiding principles for morally appropriate social and political coordination. For instance, the perfectionist aim emphasizes the fullest development of what is distinctively best or noblest about us. The utilitarian aim is directed to promoting welfare: the satisfaction of needs and well-grounded preferences. The deontological aim is directed to determining the conditions that define what is right and obligatory. The particularist aim is directed to specifying what is required of us by virtue of special roles, relations, and situations.

The analogy between strata of rationality and strata of morality provides yet another, quite different consideration that argues for the advantages of ethical diversity. The abilities and skills exercised in constructive rationality are quite diverse, and not always strongly correlated. [19] As some cognitive theorists put it, different cognitive strategies and styles make distinct contributions to inquiry. The abilities exercised in seeing the connections between theories are not always correlated with those exer-

[17] Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969); Charles Taylor, "The Diversity of Goods," in *Philosophical Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); and Stuart Hampshire, *Innocence and Experience*.

[18] Compare Charles Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[19] Compare Alvin Goldman, *Epistemology and Cognition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986); Philip Kitcher, "The Division of Cognitive Labor," *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 87, no. 1 (January 1990), pp. 5-22; and Stephen Stich, *The Fragmentation of Reason* (Cambridge: MIT, 1990).

cised in disambiguating claims; those good at unmasking hidden presuppositions are not always gifted at tracking long-range consequences. As scientific projects benefit from the cooperation of distinct preoccupations, styles, and talents—and as the best results of any one of these depends on their mutual cooperation—so, too, the successes of distinct ethical and moral enterprises depend on their mutual cooperation.

To be sure, criteria for formal validity remain constant through distinct strategies of thought, through distinct criteria for relevance and fruitfulness. But when we go beyond formal validity to generating relevant, robust lines of thought, each moral system offers distinctive guidelines for practical reason; each would attempt to develop different cognitive habits and heuristic cognitive strategies. Because the specific sensibility and mentality of each type is distinctively alert to signs of impending problems that can affect them all, each serves as a specialized early warning trouble-preventive system; each is skilled at producing certain kinds of solutions.

Finally, liberals should already have been convinced of the advantages of the diversity of ethical opinions by Mill's classic defense of liberty. Open discussion of differences of opinion, as they express differences in character and experience, is the best cure for the fallibility of narrow dogmatism; it presses for the refinement of crude and imprecise beliefs. Mill's defense of the advantages of diversity rests, however, on his view that the free expression of diverse opinions is not only the best way to reach a consensus, but also the best way to arrive at the truth. Liberals who no longer believe that inquiry must issue in a consensus on conceptions of the good appear to have retreated from stressing the advantages of ethical diversity to trying to cope with its inevitability. They attempt to define just procedural principles designed to assure political neutrality on issues that might divide those with different conceptions of the good. Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, for instance, have recently argued that it is necessary to ensure that substantive moral disagreements about issues of public policy will be tolerated in open political debate.[20] Recognizing that "consensus on . . . higher order [i.e., procedural] principles . . . is not sufficient to eliminate moral conflict from politics," they argue that "a more robust set of principles is necessary to govern the conflicts that inevitably and *legitimately* [my italics] remain. . . . [T]he higher order principles that constitute the core of consensus [should] permit greater moral disagreement about policy and greater moral agreement on how to disagree about policy."[21]

[20] Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, "Moral Conflicts and Political Consensus," *Ethics*, 1990.

[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 64, 76. Gutmann and Thompson leave it for others to investigate the social and political conditions necessary to assure that such respect is substantively realized in the social practices that affect the sense of entitlement, and the skills, necessary to participate

The practical moral of this part of my story is that decision-making bodies need representatives with different types of ethical character. To make the decisions that affect our lives, we need committees composed of Aristotelians, Confucians, Humeans, Kantians, utilitarians, and even Nietzscheans (if there are any who will consent to serve on decision-making bodies).[22] The representatives of traditional moral systems need not be — and probably should not be — philosophers: rather, they should be model psychological representatives of the directions and programs of a range of moral systems. (There is, after all, no guarantee that a card-carrying philosophical Kantian is a psychological Kantian, or that a psychological utilitarian is a philosophical consequentialist). In our practical activities, each type requires the participation of the others to provide the turns of her life that help to fulfill her ideals: here a Humean mother, there a Kantian teacher, now an Aristotelian friend, and then a Nietzschean adversary. Deontologists and consequentialists — as well as those who take long views and those who insist on experiencing the benefits of their actions — help to keep one another in line.

This kind of mutual dependence is, of course, not absolutely *necessary* for the fulfillment of our ethical projects. But you would be wise not to leave home without it. It is safer and easier to be a full-blown consequentialist if you know that there are enough deontologists around to prevent you from doing something awful for the sake of a distant good; similarly, it is safer and easier to insist on rectitude if you know that there are enough utilitarians around to press for the distribution of basic human goods. Morality is not the enterprise of an individual who, as it happens, depends on others for her welfare. It is, rather, the enterprise of a community that is composed of distinct individuals who can and should act independently of one another.

Of course, there are no decisive arguments that can force an Aristotelian to acknowledge, on pain of immorality or irrationality, his moral dependence on a Kantian conception of justice, or to force a Kantian to recognize his dependence on a Humean civil citizen. But there are very few decisive arguments of any kind in this area: at best, we can invite defenders of each position to imagine in detail what it would be like to live in a world populated only by (as it may be) Aristotelians, or Humeans,

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in public discussions on genuinely equal terms. We shall return to a discussion of whether the liberal program is practically, though not conceptually, circular: the conditions that are necessary to assure fair and just debate in the public sphere appear to presuppose the happy outcome of just those debates.

[22] There are often also *political* and *practical* reasons for introducing special-interest groups — ethnic or racial representatives, the elderly, women, farmers, educators — onto committees whose decision-making charges affect such groups: their experience and expertise is centrally relevant. The advantages of ethical diversity require only that moral diversity *also* be represented: it does not follow that such diversity must be the *only* qualification for membership on decision-making bodies.

or Kantians.[23] In the early stretches of imagining such a world, things might go well enough: there is certainly no incoherence involved. But as the thought experiment becomes more detailed — particularly as defenders of each position attempt to specify their relations to future generations and their patterns for raising and educating children — the thought experiment begins to get more difficult. Important activities and longstanding projects — projects over which considerable moral fervor is expended — have to be classified as morally insignificant, perhaps even morally questionable. More and more activities look akratic or amoral. Of course, any position can entrench itself (as hard-core dogmatic egoism does) and accept the consequences. But if it does, it will have lost some of the force of its original action-guiding substantive directions.

It is at this point, with this sort of realization, that many philosophers attempt to construct hybrid theories that graft the benefits of the insights of competing moral programs onto their own favorite systems.[24] Although the main directions of each theory are initially distinct, defenders of different theories come to recognize the need to accommodate one another's claims. Kantians like Onora O'Neill attempt to incorporate utilitarian welfare programs within a rationalist deontological frame; utilitarians like Peter Railton try to give a consequentialist account of civic and character excellences. I suspect (though, of course, it would have to be shown in considerable detail) that such hybrids have the same sort of benefits and uneasy tensions, the same jockeying for primary position, within their integrative, accommodating moral systems as occur between their unreconstructed forms. From the point of view of practical morality, it makes little difference whether diversity is achieved within one umbrella theory or whether it is achieved by a plurality of theories. The same advantages and problems arise in each case.

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[23] There is, as Bernard Williams has argued, nothing incoherent about the position of an intractable egoist. The kinds of considerations that might argue against rigid egoism come from thought experiments about what it would be like to live such a life. The ordinary practices of consistent narrow egoism would be so impoverished that no one would sensibly choose it. Or alternatively, the actual practices of such a life, when constructed in such a way that a reasonable person might choose it, are radically different from its theoretical program. Compare Bernard Williams, *Morality* (New York: Harper, 1972).

[24] Neo-Kantians try to show how Kant's deontology can accommodate Aristotelian virtue theory. See Barbara Herman, "Mutual Aid and Respect for Persons," *Ethics*, 1984; J. B. Schneewind, "The Misfortunes of Virtue," *Ethics*, vol. 101 (1990), and "Autonomy, Obligation, and Virtue: An Overview of Kant's Moral Philosophy," forthcoming in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth Century Philosophy*; Alan Wood, "Unsociable Sociability," *Philosophical Topics*, 1991; and Onora O'Neill, "The Practices of Justice and Virtue," unpublished paper. Neo-utilitarians try to include deontological constraints on the demands of beneficence or to give consequentialist accounts of the development of character traits and virtues. See Peter Railton, "Alienation, Consequentialism and the Demands of Morality," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 13, no. 2 (1984); Sam Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982); Liam Murphy, "The Demands of Beneficence," and Thomas Pogge, "Can Morality Be Productive?" (unpublished papers).

You might be concerned, at this point, that the insistence on the benefits of ethical diversity seems suspiciously upbeat, full of saccharine and light. Don't worry: the movie version is a *film noir*. To begin with, we need not *like* those with whom we cooperate; nor is cooperative activity always enjoyable. Even in its best forms, it can bring the kind of disagreement that escalates to indignation and disruptive conflict. It takes exceptionally benign circumstances to sustain successful cooperation among ethical types who not only promote but also counterbalance and sometimes block each other. When ethical characters differ about matters that are strongly important to them, they often revert to power politics. Raising the covering banner of respect for rational autonomy, they reinterpret their procedural principles in such a way as to suit themselves. In practice, it is often only by myopic hindsight that we can distinguish constructive from destructive opposition, and differentiate persuasive rhetoric from manipulative domination.[25]

We have been riding suspiciously along a vague notion of a cooperative community. But who is the *we* who are benefited by, or have reason to support, cooperation among the variety of ethical character types? Are there an indefinite number of moral positions entitled to sit on decision-making bodies? Should we fear the chaos that attends cacophony? In practice, the range of viable moral positions are limited by historical circumstances. To be understood and effectively realized, a moral position must be grounded in a community's institutions and practices. A community's specific historical and political conditions, the working psychology of its members, and the issues and charges of its decision-making bodies set strong constraints on the serious candidates for the moral systems that are capable of addressing a community's situation. Typically, there would be only a dozen or so chairs around the table of decision-making committees, particularly when decisions remain at a relatively specific action-guiding level.

Another fear is that divided committees tend to form unsatisfactory compromises, deciding on a common denominator that jeopardizes the contribution and integrity of each moral position. As long as there are Nietzscheans on our decision-making body, we need not fear settling down to mediocre compromises. In any case, compromises that merely paper-over seriously troubling practical problems rarely remain in place very long, particularly as they do not use the talents and resources that are most likely to address those problems. For what comfort it may give

[25] But despite the fact that there is often disagreement about when constructive opposition has, in a particular case, degenerated to destructive power politics, there are general objective guidelines for distinguishing them. Constructive opposition leaves all the parties better off, within the general terms set by each of their original projects; manipulative bullying closes the options available to one of the parties, in such a way as to frustrate that party's projects.

us, we can count on the recurrence of the unsolved problems that arise from mediocre compromise.

And what about the villains, the Iagos and Hitlers? Should they take an active part in our deliberations? A fear much greater than the threat of cacophony or compromise is the fear of moral imperialism, the domination of a morally suspect position. Presumptively opposed ethical positions are not, after all, always prepared to acknowledge their mutual dependence. Even when they do, they are not always prepared to accord one another the respect due to ethical and moral equals. Some ethical positions might, in what they take to be good conscience, prefer to coerce consent and manipulate cooperation. The most dangerous Hitlers are those who mask their territorial ambitions, those who are prepared to cooperate in civic life only as long as they are in the minority. They are capable of disguising their opposition to arbitration and accommodation, biding their time until they can maneuver themselves into dominant power.

No philosophical argument or moral principle, as such, can prevent ethical cooperation from degenerating into the power politics of ethical combat. Ordinary practice provides a better solution than high-minded morality. In practice, the patterns of alliances and oppositions among the participants tend to shift: Humeans and utilitarians will be allied on some issues, opposed on others; Aristotelians and Kantians will speak with one voice on some matters, divide on others; and so, too, with the interests and preoccupations of those who disguise their moral imperialism. In the best of circumstances, shifts in alliances help avoid chaotic babble, the disruption of discussion and cooperation; they block—though they cannot just in themselves absolutely prevent—the tendency to tyranny that emerges when chaos threatens, the tyranny of the majority or the equally dangerous tyranny of charisma. But when dissent is persistent and profound, there may well be disagreement all the way up: even when they all abide by Robert's Rules of Order, the members of decision-making committees are likely to differ on who should have the floor at any given time. If anything can block the influence of villainy, it is the strategy of segmentation: identifying subdivisions within villainy and placing them in continuously shifting, cross-cutting alliances with their opposition.

Should all those voices and claims have equal weight at all times? I believe, though I certainly cannot show, that there are objective constraints—highly specific, context- and issue-dependent objective constraints—on viable and appropriate solutions. I recommend *fallibilist minimal realism* about the weight that ought to be accorded to any position on any given issues. We should be *realists*: objective factors limit but do not determine the viability and acceptability of some positions on specific issues. The range of acceptable positions on an issue is not wholly open or indeterminate. Many factors enter into the determination of who should *not* be

heard on a given issue. Some of these are structural: constraints of sys-
tematic compossibility set some closure on the realization of our multiple
aims, ideals, and principles. Other constraining factors are procedural: as,
for instance, a normative order of precedence that weights matters of life
and death over niceties of etiquette, or an order of precedence that
weights against a course that would deny or silence the rights or legiti-
macy of other moral perspectives. Still other constraining and determin-
ing factors are substantive. There are general prohibitions, moral taboos
whose violation is cross-morally condemned, even when there is little
agreement on the grounds for the condemnation. Wanton and pointless
cruelty in all its many forms stands as the prime example of a constrain-
ing limit on any moral system, even when the criteria for cruelty might
be under dispute.

There are further realist constraints that are internal to each moral sys-
tem, constraints of a largely practical kind that limit the intelligibility and
viability of specific policies.[26] It is an open empirical question how much
overlap exists (and at what level of generality it exists) among the inter-
nal realist constraints on moral systems. Values or principles that seem
superficially quite different at an action-guiding level can nevertheless
converge at a greater level of generality, where sound ambiguity can flat-
ten differences.

But being clear about when we need to attend to the considerations of
a specific set of directions (or, as is more usually the case, knowing when
we have heard quite enough from whom) does not by itself provide a
royal road to determining what we need to do.[27] There are many partic-
ular persistent controversies (for instance, over what sorts of principles
should guide the formulation of a policy of taxation) in which we are not
in a position to know whether one or both views are mistaken; or
whether both are morally permissible in such a way as to leave the choice
of policy to be negotiated on political or pragmatic grounds.

[26] Compare Sabina Lovibond, *Realism and Imagination in Ethics* (Minneapolis: University
of Minnesota Press, 1983); Alasdair MacIntyre, "Relativism, Power and Philosophy," in *Rel-
ativism: Interpretation and Confrontation*, ed. Michael Krausz (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press,
1989); and David Wong, "Coping with Moral Conflict and Ambiguity," *Ethics*, 1992.

[27] It is extremely difficult for fallibilist minimal realists to draw the line between what is
objectively determinate and what remains indeterminate, between the constraints set by
moral realism and the openness assured by its minimalism. It might seem as if, in talking
about the *advantages* of ethical and moral diversity, I am committed to a specific moral sys-
tem, to a consequentialist (if not actually a utilitarian) moral system. But fallibilist minimal
realism does not, I believe, entail any particular moral system. It represents a meta-ethical
philosophical position about the interrelations among moral systems. The arguments that
can be advanced for the "advantages" of diversity, can be rephrased as showing "reasons
for" diversity, or revealing the "virtues" of diversity, or its "justice," or its being grounded
in "natural law," or in "the original constitution of our natures." Indeed, I would be more
suspicious than I am of the "advantages" of ethical diversity if I did not think that the ar-
guments for them could be rephrased in the terms of most traditional moral systems.

But we should be *minimal* realists in recognizing that there is rarely absolute closure on who should be heard: within the constraints set by moral realism, there are a range of acceptable, morally permissible, and negotiable solutions to the problems of coordinating distinct ethical projects. In practice, we do not have a map laid out by a master surveyor called "Rationality," that shows us how the land objectively lies. Bound together in many shifting patterns of alliances and oppositions for our projects, we are the map-makers. And finally, we should be strongly *fallibilist* in recognizing that ethical and moral convictions are highly unreliable. Formed by all manner of extraneous considerations, neither tradition nor a subjective sense of certainty provide reliable indices of objectivity.

Although fallibilist minimal realism does not entail any specific moral system, it does suggest a good deal of practical advice for decision-making committees: Do not allow alliances and oppositions to become fixed. Avoid globalizing the opposition. Promote numerous intersecting alliances over specific issues. Initiate relatively neutral activities and projects that are likely to elicit successful cross-allegiance cooperation, in the hope of forming mutually beneficial alliances that conduce to habits of mutual accommodation.[28] Since ethical and moral differences also bring differences about criteria for sound practical reasoning, try to formulate issues and justify decisions in terms that address the primary concerns of each participant. Show the utilitarian its advantages, articulate the reasons that favor it in Kantian terms, show the Aristotelian its virtues, and so on. When this cannot be done — when, as is sometimes the case, it is difficult to convince both an Aristotelian and a Kantian of a certain course of action — formulate the considerations in general, ambiguous terms that allow agreement in practice, without forcing intellectual agreement. Save the attempt to persuade unambiguous agreement on the interpretation and defense of general principles for friendly fireside chats or philosophical conferences, when there is nothing in particular at stake.

*The practical orientation of moral systems*

The point of cooperative discussion in decision-making committees — the point of hearing representatives from diverse moral systems — lies in their finding a way to engage in practical cooperation. Treating moral systems as directives for developing certain sorts of persons allows us to take a practical approach to moral agreement and moral conflict, attempting to find modes of cooperation that might be difficult to secure when moral systems are construed solely as competing theories about the good or about justice.

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[28] Compare David Wong, "Coping with Moral Conflict and Ambiguity."

It is, to be sure, possible and even useful to formulate and articulate a moral system as a theory about (as it may be) human thriving or the conditions for justice. But although moral systems centrally encompass both conceptual and empirical investigations, they cannot be assimilated to scientific theories, and ethical disagreement and conflict cannot be assimilated to scientific disagreement.[29] Although moral systems attempt, among other things, to explain (what they take to be) the phenomena of morality, they ought not to assume that existing practices are the final or even the most revealing indices of our moral capacities and abilities. Existing practices reflect, and tend to perpetuate, reigning values. Even theories that attempt to derive moral norms from human nature, or from the structure of rationality, address our beliefs for the sake of affecting our practices. Even when they are directed to convincing us of their truth, philosophical theories of morality are also directed to affecting what we do. It is, I believe, disingenuous for them to pretend otherwise.

At the most general level, the question that representatives of different moral systems pose for themselves is: "What should we do?" When we treat this as a practical question, calling for a proposal of the form "Let's now do $x$," it is convergence in practice, rather than agreement about theory, that matters to us. Although we are practically and morally bound to substantiate our decisions — and to convince our fellows — by advancing all manner of arguments and theories, coming to a sound convergence about what to do does not require that we all have the same (good) reasons for doing so. The conditions for convergence in practice are different from those for agreement about the truth of a theory. The distinction between the two modes of agreement is not that between practical activity on the one hand and science on the other. Practical arrangements involve all manner of straightforwardly verifiable claims and predictions, and scientific investigations involve all manner of shared practices. The distinction between theory and practice is a distinction between activities that are directed to discovering truth (as it might be expressed in unambiguous propositions) and activities that are directed to achieving some other good. To be sure, agreeing to cooperate and coordinate activities presupposes a minimal pidgin mutual understanding of what each party is to do. But this kind of basic agreement does not depend on the participants sharing, or even understanding, one another's interpretations of their activities, the rules or principles that govern them, or their respective reasons for accepting them.

The difference between agreeing to abide *by* certain rules or principles and agreeing *on* them illuminates the distinction between practical agree-

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[29] Compare Bernard Williams, "Consistency and Realism," in *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), esp. pp. 205–6; and *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).

ment and agreement on theories. David Lewis's distinction between *agreeing in desire* and *desiring alike* is helpful: two people agree in their projects just when the same state of affairs suits them both; their projects are alike just when the fulfillment of those projects can be expressed in the same proposition.[30] Adapting his maxim, we might say: "Agreement in projects makes for harmony; having the same projects may well make for strife." Hobbes's description of the state of nature is a description of the strife that arises when people desire alike; Hume's description of the cooperation that gives rise to the idea of justice is a description of the kind of harmony that can arise when people agree in their projects.[31]

What matters in practical cooperation is that the same state of affairs will, over a reasonable period of time, satisfy all parties. Using Lewis's example: to eat to their satisfaction, neither Jack Sprat nor his nameless wife need to understand one another's preferences; nor need they have the same understanding of the rule they use to divide their meat. As Jack understands it, the rule they follow is: "Separate out that white stuff and give me that red stuff." As his wife might understand it, the rule they follow is: "Separate the fat from the protein and give me the fat." They will have agreed to abide by the same rule as long as they agree to promote the same state of affairs, thinly described.

III

Once we realize that ethical diversity is central to substantive morality, as it goes beyond righteousness and decency, it becomes clear that moral education (the formation of habits and preoccupations) is a crucial area of moral concern. Important as it is, agreement on general procedural principles – agreement on rules for public debate – cannot begin to address the need for developing the variety of virtues that a practical polity requires. Respect and tolerance are not merely attitudes of reciprocal positive regard, as they might be developed and expressed in public debate. They must be substantively realized in the institutional and personal practices that affect the sense of entitlement – and the skills – that are nec-

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[30] David Lewis, "Dispositional Theories of Value," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society,* Supplementary Volume 63 (1989), p. 119.

[31] Hume's story suggests a strategy for promoting agreement in practice. First, set the conditions for people to work on projects whose outcome is satisfied by the same state of affairs, however they may be described. With luck – and it takes the luck of the coincidental compatibility of distinct projects – the parties may develop sufficient mutual understanding to formulate certain general rules for the coordination of their activities. They might even develop a set of shared general ends, if only those of maintaining their symbiotically supportive coordination. With even greater luck, they may acquire increasingly overlapping ends, realizing that they would be well served by cooperating as well as coordinating their activities.

essary to participate in such debate on genuinely equal terms. It is no good using the formulas of respect with gestures indicating impatience and contempt.[32] The principles governing the rule of law sound hollow when the courts do not treat like case alike; the principles of democratic civic participation are hollow when public education permits massive illiteracy. In any case, shared civic virtues are by no means sufficient to assure anything like a substantive civic life. The virtues of each ethical type are also essentially required.

But how, where, and by whom are they to be developed? Perhaps cultural and religious diversity can be counted on to reproduce itself. But we cannot assume that ethical diversity will do so. Certainly family life cannot, by itself, assure ethical development, let alone the development of the variety of ethical characters that a polity might need at any given time. The habits and virtues of each ethical type can only be acquired — imitated, practiced, improvised — through the educative institutions that bridge the public and the private spheres. Not only the schools, the mass media, and the high arts, but also virtually every sort of institution and organization — formal or informal — affect appropriate ethical development.

It is in the awful, clear-eyed recognition of the centrality of the role of social institutions in ethical development that Plato wrote *The Republic* and that the Jesuits formed a detailed plan of instruction for the soldiers of Christ. Those of us who are neither Platonists nor Jesuits, and who believe that liberal theories of ethical development are at best radically incomplete, at worst either naive or self-deceived, are faced with an enormous and apparently impossible task. How are we to design educative institutions that promote the development, the best exercise, and the cooperation of Aristotelians, Humeans, Kantians, utilitarians, and Nietzscheans, yet avoid the intolerable forms of Platonic and Jesuitic intervention? How wise are we to leave these matters in the hands of playground organizers, television scriptwriters, and sports commentators?

A final dark note: Whether the varieties of ethically good lives also bring the benefits that are supposed to be essentially connected with them — the respect of those we respect, the ready opportunity to engage in activities we prize, the joys of friendship and family, sharing in the flourishing of what is important to us — is a matter of great and rare good fortune, the fortune of our historical and political conditions. Whether the ethical and moral variety that is essential for fulfilling our own several projects brings practical cooperation rather than the rule of power or irresolvable conflict — whether coordination successfully satisfies the directions of each character type — is, again, a matter of rare good fortune.

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[32] But traditional moral systems differ about what sorts of actions and demeanor substantively constitute respect.

Even when cooperation and coordination work well—when we devise practical strategies to promote cooperative alliances across distinct ethical and moral directions—the "we" who are benefited by diversity are not always "me and thee" in our own lifetimes. Those of us who suffer from unfortunate historical luck can settle for the benefits of decency; and when things get really bad, the dubious satisfaction of a retreat to righteousness is available, leaving our characters to live as best they can.

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