The Ethics of Care of the Self
as Resistance to a “Peculiar Institution”

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses some of the critiques of modern moral theories (deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics) posed by Elizabeth Anscombe, Michael Stocker, Bernard Williams, and Susan Wolf. It focuses on Stocker’s challenge that when subjects try to act on such theories they become self-effacing in that they create a divide between one’s reasons and one’s motives. This study argues that in consequence such modern ethical theories have serious difficulties in dealing with the issues these philosophers raise. Nevertheless, while valuing their contributions, I attempt to formulate a more plausible solution to the problems of morality systems.

In particular, I argue that these approaches have not dealt adequately with the following questions: If morality systems are repressive and exclude the personal life, why are they still so influential? Why have not people rid themselves of systems that act to the detriment of ethical life? To address such issues, with the intention of understanding how morality systems operate, I turn to Michel Foucault’s concept of disciplinary power. After discussing the problem of the pervasiveness of modern ethical theories, I conclude by making a case for Foucault’s ethics of the care of the self as a way of addressing the problems raised by Stocker and others.
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There are lots of Severinos;  
We are exactly alike: 
exactly the same big head 
that’s hard to balance properly; 
the same swollen belly 
on the same skinny legs, 
alike because the blood 
we use has little color. 
And if we Severinos 
are all the same in life, 
we die the same death 
the same Severino death. 
The death of those who die 
of old age before thirty, 
of an ambuscade before twenty, 
of hunger a little daily. 
(The Severino death from 
from sickness and from hunger 
attacks at any age; 
even the unborn child.)1

I would thank above all my family, most especially my mother, Dona Lúcia, and my father, Zé do Monte, who faced the “morte e vida severina” and at the same time managed to find a way to educate their children. Although they lacked the opportunity to pursue higher education, they taught us its value. I would also thank my sisters, Adriana, Andrêa, Denize, and Rosa, my brothers Joe and Joan, and my wonderful nephews and nieces. Quite simply, without their support over the years this thesis could not have been written. No lesser thanks go to what I now call my Canadian family: Judy, Sonia, Reubens, Michael, Jun, and Ray. I love all of you.

Along with my family, I have had through the years a group of caring friends who have stood by me through thick and thin. I would like to thank my Galera do Rock: Marcos and Márcio, again including my brother Joe. In the face of hunger, violence, poverty, and

1 From The Death and Life of a Severino by João Cabral de Melo Neto, translated by Elizabeth Bishop.
stigmatization, we could rely only on the arts. To “Pilar” we were nothing more than rock and roll, reggae, hip hop, and manguebeat, a censure that almost cost us our lives. The poetry of Chico Science became our education. Our sole weapon was to make an “embolada com samba e maracatu, e tudo bem envenenado,” and we knew that survival meant “sair da lama e enfrentar os urubus.” Our “veneno” and love was our shield, and we won, we did it! Indeed, we can collectively say that justice was served. In these same times, Catarina was there with her constant kindness, warmth, and caring. In later years, there came Mauro and Mara. Each of you should know how much I value your friendship.

Thanks alone are never enough to recognize my friend França for his unconditional support when I decided to leave my professional career to pursue my studies in philosophy. Our meeting of minds occurred while we watched the scene in the film Pixote where Lilica sings Força Estranha. Both of us are that “menino correndo,” and we recognize the force that spurs us on to struggle in the face of every challenge. This is why we sing, and we can never stop to fight. I love you so much, dear França.

I have always believed in education, not only for my personal growth, but as something that could contribute to the enrichment of my family and my friends and ultimately to a better and more just society. Indeed, I learned the importance of education from my elementary school teacher Socorro. When going to school meant that those who lived below the poverty line had to confront segregation and bullying daily, and my only reason for being there was the free meal, Socorro advised me to seek out a better school to develop my potential. Where I was, being poor meant being seen as an indigent, futureless, in the uncomplimentary words of my English teacher, at best a sugar cane worker (my father temporally worked as one). Even in the face of
such adversity, Socorro set me on a path toward knowledge. In so many ways, this thesis is the product of her love for education.

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I dedicate this thesis to *los nadie*, “*que no practican cultura, sino folklore*” as they say, and to all *negros dramás*, particularly my brother *negro drama* Joe who has been for me a constant inspiration. This is for you with all my love.

For Mister Key: even without you, Sir, I am still an aspirant. The only real difference is that now I aspire to Philosophy. *Amor fati.*

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Chapter 1

Introduction

ANTIGONE: There is not shame in honouring my brother.

CREON: Was not his enemy, who died with him, your brother?

ANTIGONE: Yes, both were brothers, both of the same parents.

CREON: You honour one, and so insult the other. (Sophocles, Antigone 140)

Sophocles’s Antigone illustrates the incompatibility between normative morality and personal integrity (projects, commitments, experiences, and values). In the classical Greek play, this conflict occurs when Antigone decides to disobey Creon’s decree prescribing that warriors who fought for the country of Thebes should be buried with honour, while, on the other hand, warriors who supported the enemy should be left unburied. Punishment for defiance is death. Antigone’s brother Eteocles, who defended the city, was buried and received all honours, while the body of her other brother, Polynices, was left on the ground unmourned and unburied. Antigone acts out of her “duty to the dead” and was influenced by her love for Polynices, “My way is to share my love, not share my hate” (Sophocles, Antigone 140). Antigone is caught between her love for her brother and the obligation of Creon’s decree. Both she and Creon believe that their reasoning is consistent with the will of the gods. The resultant conflict illustrates both the pervasiveness of morality in the ethical life and the fact that general obligations of a law-like character do not take into account the personal goods of the subjects.

Even in a reading of Sophocles some contemporary issues can be identified. First, Creon’s decree invades the ethical life so that it creates a split between Antigone’s (moral)
reason to obey the decree and her motives for burying her brother Polynices. This resonates with Michael Stocker’s argument that the obligation inherent in modern moral theories causes a division between one’s reasons and one’s motives (“Schizophrenia” 453-466). Both Antigone and Creon have an unconditional commitment to morality. Antigone claims that she has a duty to the dead, so she will perform her duty even if the price is her own death. Creon believes the will of the gods does not allow him to change his decree despite the consequences for his own family. Among contemporary authors, Susan Wolf discusses such an unconditional commitment to morality requiring a total impartiality that leads to undermining the features of a loving relationship (“Moral Saints” 79-98). In fact, one might even apply to the morality systems that govern both Creon and Antigone Bernard Williams’s adjective “peculiar” (“Peculiar Institution” 174-196) since even as early as Sophocles the morality systems operated through the concept of moral obligation that dominated the ethical life. Finally, Antigone and her sister Ismene were accused of being mad by Creon, “I do believe the creatures both are mad; One lately and crazy, the other from her birth” (Sophocles, Antigone 141). Antigone defied the decree although the penalty is death; Ismene decided to die with Antigone. There are echoes here of Michael Foucault’s concept of normalization: the “normal” standard is those who obey the decree while the “abnormal” (“mad”) category is applied to those who do not (Discipline & Punish 101-102). Even Creon’s distinction between being crazy from birth and becoming crazy later evokes the concept of normalization.

Problems of morality systems are not merely a thing of the past. Contemporary society is well aware that competing theories have become divisive in terms of identifying the common

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2 One can also argue that, by the fact that the dead is her brother, Antigone’s duty to the dead (a general obligation) overlaps with her feeling for her brother (her special obligation), although this is unclear.
good. What further analysis has brought out, however, is that such theories, which are pervasive and which function on the principle of moral obligation, also create conflictual interior situations.

In this thesis, I explore Foucault’s ethics of care of the self (“le souci de soi”) as a potential solution to Michael Stocker’s challenge that modern ethical theories create a bifurcation between one’s reasons and one’s emotions. I begin by analysing how Kantianism and utilitarianism are affected by Stocker’s critique, and in doing so I clarify some misconceptions regarding his challenge itself. Since both deontology and utilitarianism seem to succumb very readily to Stocker’s objection, I take into account separately what virtue ethics theories have to offer. I analyse in particular whether virtue ethics theories, with their stronger emphasis on the person and on character, are immune to Stocker’s challenge. I also take into account Stocker’s own solution to the problem. After discussing the issue of the pervasiveness of modern ethical theories and why this is so, I conclude by making a case for Foucault’s ethics of the care of the self as a way of addressing the problems raised by Stocker and others.

In Chapter 2, I proceed immediately to take up Elizabeth Anscombe’s critical point that modern moral theories suffer from a lack of philosophy of psychology and that this impacts the study of morality (“Modern Moral Philosophy” 1-19). This paves the way to consider the critique of Michael Stocker that modern ethical theories in fact create a moral psychology that is divided. The chapter largely focuses on the latter, in particular on Stocker’s challenge to Kantian and utilitarian theories of morality. Stocker uses as an example the illustration of Smith’s visit to you in hospital, an illustration that has become well-known among moral philosophers. If Smith were a deontic thinker, the rationale for the visit would be that he always tries to do what he thinks to be his duty. Were he a utilitarian, Smith would offer the rationale that he is visiting
because it is the right action that maximizes the happiness/utility of all involved. These rationales hardly involve the friend as the primary value and motive. While you would have expected that Smith’s motives were because of you as the source of value, Smith has acted instead on his moral rationales. This sort of situation produces psychological conflicts that can make life incoherent.

Using Stocker’s example of Smith’s visit, it is seen that both Kantianism and utilitarianism succumb to Stocker’s malady of the spirit. Smith’s reason for his action and his motive for visiting you as his friend are in conflict. His deontic and consequentialist rationales cannot serve as source of value without undermining the friendship by treating the friend as an instrument to achieve some prescribed ends. Considering that Stocker has as his starting point a conception of goods such as friendship, love, and sense of community as fundamental for a good life, the issue is that modern ethical theories preclude them. Actually, the theories generate a two-fold problem: they diminish such essential personal and social goods, and they create divided moral psychologies. More than that, the pervasive character of moral theories creates a hold on life: life is shaped to fit the theory, rather than the theory being used to improve life.

The chapter concludes that Kantianism and utilitarianism present serious difficulties in dealing with Stocker’s challenge since, as he argues, modern moral theories “deal only with reasons, with values, with what justifies. They fail to examine motives and the motivational structures and constraints of ethical life” (“Schizophrenia” 453). As a result, both the deontic and the utilitarian approach succumb to Stocker’s indictment that modern ethical theories produce a split between one’s motives and one’s reasons. Since Stocker’s paper clearly addresses deontic and utilitarian rationales, Chapter 2 deals directly only with these two theories.
Because its rationale is quite distinct, with a much more personal approach, virtue ethics was left to the next chapter. The issue is whether it too succumbs to Stocker’s critique.

Chapter 3, then, is concerned with the distinctive approach of virtue ethics, and whether it can provide a response to Stocker’s challenge that is better than a deontic or a utilitarian approach. Although some assume that Stocker’s arguments apply only to deontology and utilitarianism since these are action-centred theories, I judge that the agent-centered approach of virtue ethics likewise does not escape. Despite its “flexibility” regarding codifiability, virtue ethics cannot prevent a divided psychology within the agent. In the case of Smith, if he were to appeal to a virtuous exemplar version of virtue ethics, he would deem you as secondary. This too involves a split between his reasons and his motives. If he acts out of such a virtue as friendship, his reasoning shifts to give primacy to the virtue. This comes at the expense of submitting to a predicament identified by Gary Watson: “any ethics of virtue that lacks a theory of virtue will be nonexplanatory, but any ethics of virtue that has such a theory will collapse into ethics of outcome” (456). Unfortunately, virtue ethics cannot solve such a dilemma in a way that can plausibly deal with Stocker’s criticism. Since virtue ethics theories fail to offer a convincing solution, they join both utilitarianism and deontology as ethical theories that are self-defeating, unable to provide the agent with a motive for action without creating a divide between one’s reason and one’s motive.

In Chapter 4, I argue against the contention that one should disregard Stocker’s diagnosis of modern moral theories as self-effacing because he fails to show that a non-divided psychology is better than a divided one. I demonstrate that taking such a position implies precluding goods (friendship, love, community) that are fundamental for personal and social life. I recognize also that Stocker’s medicine to cure the malady of spirit by emphasising the value of
emotions in the moral process is necessary but insufficient in itself to deal with the problem. Its helpfulness comes from the fact that Stocker’s starting point is the criterion of values/motives that are derived from emotions.

Bernard Williams’s indictment that morality relies on the fundamental idea of moral obligation was considered as a complement to Stocker’s critique. Williams contends that morality systems dominate every sphere of human life: “If obligation is allowed to structure ethical thought, there are several natural ways in which it can come to dominate life altogether” (“Peculiar Institution” 202). Although Williams puts forward an idea of ethics whose source is a group of core emotions, the difficulty is that he does not address how the morality system constitutes the subject, nor does he talk about resistance to such a pervasive system. Thus, both Stocker’s and Williams’s solutions, while they provide helpful insights, are not really sufficient to deal with malady of spirit.

Seeking to investigate the effect of morality systems on the agent, the chapter turned to Susan Wolf’s discussion of the problems of an unconditional commitment to morality and her recognition of the constitution of the agent that comes with an ideal of a moral saint (“Moral Saints” 79-98). Wolf contends that the needs of one’s personal life are at odds with any unconditional commitment to morality. She also examines the conflict between the moral point of view (i.e., a normative value that morality imposes to the agent without truly embracing personal values) and the point of view of individual perfection (i.e., one’s own evaluation of a good life). While Wolf does touch on the idea of perfecting the agent, she does not address how resistance to such morality systems is possible.

Stocker, Williams and Wolf have all made valuable contributions to the discussion, but their contributions leave unresolved the issue of why, if malady of spirit, morality systems, and
moral sainthood all undermine the personal life, they have continued to be such prominent features in the moral landscape. If they preclude goods that people value – and should value – why have not such morality systems been rejected? To open up such questions, the next chapter takes up Foucault’s aesthetic of existence to see the conditions needed to formulate a broader answer to Stocker’s dilemma.

Consequently, in Chapter 5, I attempt to formulate a more plausible solution to the problems of morality systems raised by Anscombe, Stocker, Williams, and Wolf than is provided by these philosophers themselves. I maintain that their approaches have not dealt adequately with the following questions: If morality systems are repressive and exclude the personal life, why are they still so influential? Why have not people rid themselves of morality systems that act to the detriment of ethical life?

Addressing these issues, I turn to Michael Foucault’s concept of disciplinary power aiming to understand how morality systems operate. First, I briefly examine the historical methods used by Anscombe, Stocker, Jerome B. Schneewind and Robert B. Louden to explain the evolution by which morality came to be defined by its legalistic characteristics. In contrast, I then consider Foucault’s genealogical method, aiming to understand better just how disciplinary power plays a role in morality systems. Foucault’s approach helps to answer the question of the attractiveness of morality systems despite their domination of the ethical life. In fact, Foucault’s account of power as something that operates as a positive rather than only in a negative/repressive way helps to explain why morality systems are still attractive. This also accounts for how disciplinary power produces moral subjects.
I consider Foucault’s practices of freedom as a form of resistance to the morality system. Since for Foucault, power, “an action upon the actions of others” (EEW 3 341), is everywhere, freedom is possible only if one plays a different game of power. This means understanding power relations and avoiding an imposed objective subjectivity. These approaches are practices of freedom that form the fundamental conditions for an ethics of care of the self, a concept that involves also a care for others. This means first that one has to be concerned for one’s self so as to avoid an imposed identity. The ethics of care of the self is in itself resistance to normative power and is possible if subjects begin to look upon themselves as artistic creations.

I also argue that Foucauldian ethics offers a cure for Stocker’s malady of spirit since an ethics of care of the self precludes the normative aspects that cause the problem in the first place. This ethical approach would also value emotions, as Stocker does, while not being reducible to them. Finally, practices of freedom would resist the pervasive character of the morality system that Williams has so clearly identified.

In chapter 6, I conclude by briefly explaining that Foucault’s ethics of the care of the self is not simply an aesthetic project in the ordinary sense. The essential condition for an ethics of care of the self involves practices of freedom, by which one constitutes oneself and thus resists normalizing power. Since one must reject disciplinary normalizing power, creative ways of self-constitution become important. One is required to work constantly. In this way, such creativity turns out to be an avoidance of the process of normalization. Foucault speaks of considering

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3 In this thesis, references to Foucault’s works use the standard abbreviations found in The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon. The initial letter “E” denotes an English translation; abbreviations for the French originals use the initial letter “F”. All abbreviations used here are noted in the “Works Cited” section.
oneself as an artist would consider a work of art in process. Such an analogy of taking life as a work of art can be interpreted as seeing the self as a subject without a fixed inside but constantly open to new possibilities.
Chapter 2

Modern Moral Theories: The Malady of Spirit

In the latter half of the twentieth century in the English-speaking world, normative moral theories, which had been dominated since the Enlightenment by two competing traditions (Kantian deontology and utilitarianism), came under scrutiny due to their lack of an account of moral psychology. This scrutiny may be said to have been initiated by Elizabeth Anscombe’s watershed article, “Modern Moral Philosophy” published in 1958. A central thesis Anscombe sets forth is that “[i]t is not profitable for us at present to do moral philosophy; that should be laid aside at any rate until we have an adequate philosophy of psychology, in which we are conspicuously lacking” (1). Following a similar line of reasoning, Michael Stocker subsequently nuanced in considerable depth what a lack of moral psychology means for ethical theory. Stocker posed a dilemma that demonstrates the malady of spirit (the conflict between one’s reasons and one’s emotions) present in modern moral theories.

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4 It can be observed that this critique applies also to some contractarian ethical approaches as well as to virtue ethics. It is true that Anscombe calls for study of a notion of flourishing in the Aristotelian sense (18). However, she immediately emphasizes that we do not have a proper understanding of human nature, virtue, or flourishing itself. Although some reactions to her paper have attempted to revive virtue ethics, this does not make virtue ethics immune to her criticism. Both the peculiarity of virtue ethics as a “non-codified” ethical approach and the fact that Anscombe was interpreted as having supported it drew some who embrace Anscombe’s and Stocker’s critiques to favour virtue ethics over its competing theories. Consequently, while the current chapter will deal with Kantianism and utilitarianism, virtue ethics will be discussed separately in Chapter 3, where the discussion will clarify whether it can be considered immune to Stocker’s challenge.
In this chapter, I analyze Stocker’s challenge, namely that modern moral theories produce a divided moral psychology leading the agent to an unhealthy life. I begin by introducing Stocker’s challenge as a dilemma and by assessing the reasoning behind Kantian deontology and Utilitarianism in order to elucidate these approaches. Following this, I proceed to discuss whether such modern ethical theories can plausibly accommodate Stocker’s challenge and avoid the malady of spirit of which he speaks. A final consideration will formulate what I judge to be the paramount objection that Stocker’s critique poses to modern moral theories.

**Stocker’s Dilemma: The Challenge**

In his own landmark paper, “The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories,” Michael Stocker asserts that modern ethical theories “deal only with reasons, with values, with what justifies. They fail to examine motives and the motivational structures and constraints of ethical life” (453). Taking into consideration that the good life entails harmony between motivation and reason, Stocker argues that by insufficiently acknowledging the experiential quality of moral agents, ethical theories frequently cause a divided psychology by creating friction between motive and reasoning. As an illustration of this conflict he proposes a hypothetical but credible

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5 Although Stocker uses the word “schizophrenia” in his article, in this thesis, I prefer to avoid its use due to the fact that the word usually designates a mental illness. I have retained it only when citing other authors. In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word most broadly indicates a breakdown in the relationship between one’s thoughts, feelings and actions. It is, of course, a question of judgement, but I think the application of the word in the context of morality can be achieved by using synonymous terms such as split, divide, bifurcation, divided psychology, partition, and malady of spirit. This, hopefully, will avoid the risk of making readers uncomfortable. I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Sypnowich for raising this point.
example of the consequences that would flow from utilitarianism and Kantian deontology. This goes as follows:

You are very bored and restless and at loose ends when Smith comes in once again. You are now convinced more than ever that he is a fine fellow and a real friend – taking so much time to cheer you up, traveling all the way across town, and so on. You are so effusive with your praise and thanks that he protests that he always tries to do what he thinks is his duty, what he thinks will be best. You at first think he is engaging in a polite form of self-deprecation, relieving the moral burden. But the more you two speak, the more clear it becomes that he was telling the literal truth: that it is not essentially because of you that he came to see you, not because you are friends, but because he thought it his duty, perhaps as a fellow Christian or Communist or whatever, or simply because he knows of no one more in need of cheering up and no one easier to cheer up. (Stocker, “Schizophrenia” 462)

The example here shows that having deontic reasoning as his motive for acting, as Smith does, seems incompatible with his action in the situation described above. Assuming that there is in the first place a relationship between two friends (one of friendship/love), to learn that the

6 This project will make use of “static” scenarios and ethical dilemmas for the purpose of better illustrating the arguments. Still, it is true that reducing complex ethical issues to a caricature can be misleading. Addressing the Machiavellian dirty hands thesis in political science, Demetris Tillyris asserts that “Whilst simplicity in philosophy is often seen as a virtue, the complexity of moral life is such that we are often bewitched by examples that seem compelling but mischaracterize our messy moral cosmos. And, whilst ‘static’ scenarios typically point to how messy morality is, they tend to oversimplify our complex moral reality (65).” Still, “static” scenarios and dilemmas are necessary devices to spell out an argument. While Tillyris’s point is valid, in this project it will be taken as precautionary warning to avoid oversimplification of the issues discussed.
reason behind Smith’s visit was a sense of duty rather than the outcome of friendship itself would create an awkward situation that could threaten the friendship. Thus, deontic theory, according to its own systemic moral principles, can be seen to create psychological conflict and to contribute to making one’s life incoherent.

Even if one has a different interpretation of Kantianism, the fact that Kant’s moral theory is constrained by the concept of duty will create the split between one’s reasons and one’s motives. For instance, Thomas E. Hill Jr. highlights the fact that Kantian pluralists “attempt to define and defend rights and/or justice while remaining (more or less) neutral with regard to evaluations of personal ends and preferences” (748). Consequently these philosophers disregard both the fact that people have different conceptions about what is intrinsically valuable, as well as the fact that ethical theories have to consider individual judgement. In Hill’s Kantian account, personhood – instead of rights or duties – is taken as the starting point: “Rather, the principles of right and duty are determined by rational reflection from a point of view that counts each agent as equally authoritative regarding moral principles” (758). This means that Hill’s reading of Kant would allow for individual judgement and perhaps even would allow space for the personal life. Still, here the right becomes independent of the good, thus creating its own moral divide. Moreover, the idea of moral principles based on duties will continue to cause the divide that Stocker criticizes.

In addition, one may argue that it is possible to fashion a deontic theory of virtue which would give room to a virtue such as friendship. As a result, this account would be sufficiently flexible to allow Smith to rely on friendship as a virtue and therefore avoid a conflict. Nevertheless, in a deontic theory of virtue, “The good that we are to promote is right action for its own sake – duty for duty’s sake. Similarly, the virtues tend to be defined in terms of pro-
attitudes towards one’s duties. Virtue is important, but only because it helps us do our duty” (Louden 202). The same understanding is found in Schneewind, who holds that Kantianism can only give the virtues a secondary and partial role in morality (199). In other words, the rationale behind Smith’s visit is still a sense of duty which leads to a divided psychology since it puts the friendship as secondary. This is so because indeed Smith’s action is constrained by duty, and the virtue such as friendship remains only an instrument to help the agent act out of duty.

Utilitarianism is equally unhelpful since its answer to the dilemma posed by Stocker would not change the outcome. If the reason for Smith’s visit is because it is the right action that maximizes the happiness/utility of all involved, this again would create a divided moral psychology similar to that in a deontic approach. Smith’s act is hardly one motivated out of friendship. Perhaps in this case a utilitarian would argue that the moral action would require Smith to lie to produce the best outcome. Unfortunately, this still produces a situation of conflict that does not fit the notion of friendship; it additionally disregards the utilitarian rationale as the source of one’s motive to act morally. As Stocker notes convincingly, “[w]hat is lacking in these theories is simply – or not so simply – the person. For, love, friendship, affection, fellow feeling, and community all require that the other person be an essential part of what is valued” (“Schizophrenia” 459). The end result is that such theories seem to lack psychological reality: they do not seem to take into account that they were designed for creatures endowed with a human psyche.

The point is that a true friend would visit you in the hospital because he cared about you and not merely because duty obliged him to do so. As Scott Woodcock notes, Smith’s visit

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7 This point is taken up further in Chapter 3.
seems to be missing the intimacy that makes friendship and other types of personal relationships valuable (“Moral Schizophrenia” 5). In reality, as Stocker expresses it, “My goal in visiting him might be simply to cheer him up for his own sake, not to act for the sake of the good” (“Values and Purposes” 754). The normative structure of deontology and utilitarianism creates a division between Smith’s reasons to visit you and his motive to act. If Smith should display his reasons, you would probably feel disappointed because he did not derive his motives for visiting you from you as the source of the good as friendship. Woodcock articulates this well: “As soon as Smith discloses that he has come because of a desire to discharge some underlying obligation, the ordinary assumption that he is there because of a direct concern for your welfare seems to evaporate” (“Moral Schizophrenia” 8). Knowing that his reason to visit you is derived from either deontology or utilitarianism might actually frustrate the friendship since in this situation one would expect friendship itself to be the reason and motive of his visit. Similarly, Smith in turn would be disappointed once your frustration led him to realize that he has to decide between giving up his ethical rationales (be it deontic or consequentialist) or his friendship. Regardless of Smith’s reaction or yours, Stocker’s point is that both deontology and utilitarianism are self-effacing because what they rationally prescribe fails to provide proper motivation for acting on such theories.  

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8 It is worth stressing that the issue in Stocker’s challenge is the split between one’s reasons and one’s emotions. For Stocker, such goods as friendship, love, community, and personal projects are features of a good life. If one accepts, for example, that friendship is a feature of a good life, an ethical theory should not undermine such goods when one is acting on them. In other words, one cannot maintain both one’s friendship and one’s commitment to a modern ethical theory. In the example of Smith, either alternative fails to produce a harmony between his reasons and his motives. This is precisely the malady of spirit of which Stocker speaks.
On one hand, such ethical rationales as prescribed by modern ethical theories often not only form the basis of moral decision making, but indeed, more generally, permeate one’s life. However, Stocker asserts that such apparently objective factors as “duty, obligation, and rightness are only one small part of ethics” (“Schizophrenia” 455). It must also be considered that the subjective element – the values of personal and interpersonal relations and activities – play a central role. When modern ethical theories lack this subjective focus, they impose a sort of external burden that in fact coerces human beings by putting them into difficult situations that unnecessarily create internal conflicts and make peoples’ lives incoherent. As is well illustrated in Stocker’s example of Smith’s visit, any outward display of such an ethical rationale, be it utilitarian or deontic, can create personally uncomfortable situations.

On the other hand, if Smith gives primacy to friendship, he cannot ascribe his visit to such action-guiding principles aiming to achieve the good as are prescribed by those theories. As Stocker asserts, “Love, friendship, affection, fellow feeling, and community, like many other states and activities, essentially contain certain motives and essentially preclude certain others; among those precluded we find motives comprising the justification, the goals, the goods of those ethical theories most prominent today” (“Schizophrenia” 461). In other words, a good such as friendship has in its essence motives that in some situations will preclude the motives that

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9 It is important to note that Stocker’s challenge is somewhat more complex than it seems. The issue is whether one is acting out of friendship or acting for the sake of friendship. The former involves an embodiment of one’s reason with one’s emotions so that the person/friendship itself takes priority. On the other hand, the latter implies that one’s action is caused for the sake of keeping the friendship, where the person becomes secondary while the virtue of friendship has primacy. The key point is that one should not instrumentalize the friend even for the sake of friendship. (Although I don’t feel like visiting my friend, I will visit her because I want to keep our friendship.) This distinction will be further considered at a later point.
deontology and utilitarianism offer for acting out of them. In Smith’s case, visiting you as a friend and keeping you as primary preclude any motive derived from either deontic or consequentialist rationales.

Stocker appears to consider as morally valid motivating factors motives that can lead one to act in a truly personal manner (e.g., sympathy, care, love). In reality these will operate by inclination. One will act according to one’s personal inclination, although sometimes reason will intervene over pure inclination so as to avoid “bad” things. Here, reason would include whatever would justify one’s action in an impersonal/objective sense. In a truly impersonal sphere of objective morality, people should act according to detached moral principles. Clearly, however, it is not the case that one will always do what one rationally considers the most proper thing. Indeed, by forming people to operate in a conflicted and oppressed way, modern moral systems work neither to the benefit of personal nor interpersonal – societal/universalist – life. On the one hand, they do not benefit the personal life because they compel people to adopt motives that run counter to personal commitments (relationships of love, friendship, fellow-feeling, and community). On the other hand, while these theories seek to expound a rationale that commends universalist decision-making procedures in an impersonal way, they undermine such goods as friendship and community that foster societal lives in practice.

Smith’s acting on the basis of either of these ethical theories (whether utilitarian or deontic) generates disharmony between his reason and his motives (sympathy/care/love). Since, for Stocker, harmony between one’s reason and one’s motives is “a mark of a good life” (“Schizophrenia” 454), Smith is forced into a fragmented moral psychology. On one hand, he has a moral rationale for his actions that puts friendship in second place; on the other, if he prioritizes friendship, he has to abandon his moral rationale for his actions. As action-guide
principles, modern ethical theories seem incompatible with providing a bridge between one’s reasons and one’s motives in such a way that neither the former nor the latter would have primacy over the other. Stocker does not deny the values that modern moral theories attempt to uphold. What Stocker finds unacceptable is their impersonal character:

There is, thus, great plausibility in taking as good what these theories advance as good. But when we try to act on the theories, try to embody their reasons in our motives – as opposed to simply seeing whether our or others’ lives would be approved of by the theories – then in a quite mad way, things start going wrong. The personalities of loved ones get passed over for their effects, moral action becomes self-stultifying and self-defeating. (“Schizophrenia” 466)

Stocker here has observed the intrusion of modern ethical theories into the private sphere, where the theories become paramount and the agent secondary. In this respect, both Kantian deontology and utilitarianism succumb to his critique.

It is worth noting that Bernard Williams submits that the problem is even more extensive than simply affecting the narrowly ethical realm. Once mainstream moral theories based on obligation dictating people’s lives without allowing for subjectivities impact on ethical thought they can infringe on every area of human life. “If obligation is allowed to structure ethical thought,” observes Williams, “there are several natural ways in which it can come to dominate life altogether”\(^{10}\) (“Peculiar Institution” 182). In dealing with these objections to modern

\(^{10}\) Williams would add that Utilitarianism can lessen one’s feelings – and thus one’s integrity – since bad feelings about an action performed rightly by Utilitarian standards then “will be from a utilitarian view irrational” (“Critique” 104). Thus, Utilitarianism can alienate one not only from one’s integrity (identity, feelings, projects, etc.) but even from one’s actions.
morality systems it is also important to take into account a comment of Susan Wolf: “My objection or distaste is for the idea of an absolute, unconditional commitment to morality, not with the actions that such a commitment would command” (“One Thought” 80).11

**Avoiding Malady of Spirit?**

As noted earlier, the issues regarding modern moral philosophy hinge on the lack of a moral psychology. Anscombe stresses that we cannot do ethics without “a sound philosophy of psychology” (4). Stocker likewise contends that modern ethical theories operate to enforce a bifurcation between one’s motives and one’s reasons due to their lack of psychological realism. As a consequence, presuming that these critiques are cogent, philosophers when doing ethics have a responsibility to meet the requirement by taking into account moral psychology. At the same time, while there is clearly a mismatch between the demands of Kantian deontology and utilitarianism and the fact that human beings are endowed with subjectivities, it is unclear what a philosophy of psychology that considered ethical theories would look like. On one hand, there is the psychological fact of the individual person; on the other hand, there are the normative dimensions of ethical theories. This raises a number of crucial questions. Is it possible to incorporate the demand for a philosophy of psychology into modern ethical theories? Should one be permitted to depart from psychological facts to build a moral theory? Which of the two should have supremacy?

Some philosophers have paid attention to the appeal for a moral psychology. They believe that such a call does not require discarding utilitarianism and Kantian deontology, but it does force their proponents to bring the moral demand closer to moral psychology. This

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11 Williams’s and Wolf’s views will be examined further in Chapter 4.
interpretation is largely concerned with the question of the high demands that modern ethical
theories make. Indeed, this analysis affects both utilitarianism and Kantian deontology to the
extent that these theories require overriding either one’s integrity\textsuperscript{12} (personal projects,
commitments, values) or one’s motives so as to produce a moral divide. In this case, the way to
address the appeal for a moral psychology would be to lower the bar for human moral
judgements so as to appreciate psychological factors and make it possible to synthetize motives
and justifications, thus avoiding the bifurcation to which Stocker refers.

Among such theorists, Samuel Scheffler maintains that it is possible to deal with the high
demandingness of a moral theory by considering that its demands are built into its content.
Sheffler also stresses that the issue lies in “an understanding, in other words, both of how and
why the content of morality is constrained by considerations of the agent’s psychology and well-
being, and of the ways in which it is appropriate for morality to enter into an agent’s life, and to
impinge on his or her thought, deliberation, feeling, and action” (537). Commenting on this,
Sophie Rietti reconstructs Scheffler’s approaches to address the moral psychology challenge. In
discussing Scheffler’s three characteristics that a too demanding ethical theory may display,
Rietti comments:

First, demandingness may mean \textit{stringency} – how much does the theory ask of agents in
morally relevant contexts? Second, demandingness may be a matter of \textit{pervasiveness} –

\textsuperscript{12} Williams contends that the impartiality that utilitarianism (and Kantian deontology) requires overrides one’s
integrity, thus alienating the agent from his or her actions. Moreover, the pervasiveness of such theories can create a
too demanding situation where reasoning about what is, or is not, permissible can override basic feelings, leading to
what Williams calls “one thought too many” (“Persons” 18). This in turn can contribute to Stocker’s malady of
spirit.
how many, and which, contexts does the theory treat as morally relevant? Are any parts of human life exempt from its encroachments, or at least left open to individual discretion? Lastly, demandingness may be a matter of *overridingness* – do moral considerations trump (all) other kinds of considerations? (351)

From Rietti’s perspective, any one of these conditions can make a moral theory too demanding. The problem is compounded if it is demanding about the wrong things for the wrong reasons. Rietti states that taking moral philosophy into account, the main problem with theories is their stringency: “Does the theory ask more and other than we are psychologically capable of doing?” If so, like Scheffler, Rietti holds that one should reject stringency. (351)

Even so, Scheffler’s approach seems ineffective in dealing with Stocker’s dilemma. It is true that if one wants to tackle the pervasiveness of modern ethical theories, one could discuss the possibility of limiting or exempting the characteristic of moral demandingness. This might involve weakening the deontic or legalistic characteristic of an ethical theory by creating an exception.\(^\text{13}\) Still, it is easy to miss the point that Stocker’s objection to modern ethical theories is not a matter of high demandingness. It is a question of whether such theories can offer a rationale that will be embodied in one’s motives rather than creating a split between the justification of one’s action and one’s motives for acting. In Stocker’s terms, “Not to be moved by what one values – what one believes good, nice, right, beautiful, and so on – bespeaks a malady of the spirit. Not to value what moves one also bespeaks a malady of the spirit” (“Schizophrenia” 453-454). The implication is that even when the agent is psychologically capable of fulfilling the demand of modern ethical theories, this can come at the expense of

\(^{13}\) Obviously, one might legitimately ask here whether the exception, especially when it is multiplied, does not nullify, or at least weaken, at least for some individuals, the deontic rationale of the obligation itself.
goods like love, friendship, and community. Since the good life calls for a harmony between love/friendship and the justification to achieve the good, a disjunction between the two is indicative of a malady of spirit.

The high demands issue is of little relevance here. In the example of Smith’s visit, taking a utilitarian rationale shows that even if Smith happens to be a utilitarian à la Peter Singer,\(^{14}\) the fact that Smith will come without the primary reason for his visiting being his friend creates a divided moral psychology. This is why arguments for a version of indirect utilitarianism do not circumvent Stocker’s problem.\(^{15}\) It is not a simple case of alienating the agent from the actions. For instance, if Smith held an indirect utilitarian approach, like that suggested in Peter Railton’s “Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality,” which would allow him not to commit to a decision-making principle as the motivating reason for his action, but only to a more general criterion of rightness, this would not avoid a malady of spirit. Although indirect utilitarianism does not appear on the surface to call for a pervasive consequentialism to slip into one’s life, the reality is that if with the demands of utility one can be “required to abandon loved ones, or avoid entering into relationships with them in the first place, due to considerations of overall good, then the worry about alienation, while still indirect, is still there” (Rietti 354).

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\(^{14}\) Singer argues that “if it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it” (231).

\(^{15}\) Stocker would contend that bringing theories of indirection into the debate do not resolve the problem due to the fact that “we do not seem to act by indirection, at least not in such areas as love, friendship, affection, fellow feeling, and community” (“Schizophrenia” 463).
Moreover, an indirect utilitarian approach will still treat friendship as an instrumental good\textsuperscript{16} which is the main factor producing a split between one’s reasons and one’s emotions.

Others have dealt with Stocker’s challenge by accepting his appeal to include moral psychology without concluding that his approach is totally disruptive. One such, Scott Woodcock, thinks that Stocker’s challenge deserves consideration, and that ethical theories should attempt to meet the psychological demand rather than to assume that a split between one’s reasons and one’s emotions is pathological or to argue that that the criticism does not apply to one’s preferred theory. Woodcock maintains that “instead of assuming that moral schizophrenia is disruptive enough to be pathological and then focusing on whether it can be avoided, proponents of modern ethical theory ought to investigate the psychological obstacles associated with this condition and the extent of the burdens that it poses for human agents” (“Moral Schizophrenia” 25). In other words, rather than replacing modern ethical theories by another approach, Woodcock contends that Stocker’s challenge should introduce a welcome psychological problem that these theories should handle. To sustain his claim that such a moral divide is not disruptive, Woodcock argues that “Stocker fails to put his own alternative forward for the purpose of comparison” (“Moral Schizophrenia” 17). Stocker does not demonstrate that a morally undivided person would have a significantly better life than one with a morally divided psychology\textsuperscript{17}, or that adhering to a non-divisive method (one that does not offer a predetermined codified approach to deal with moral problems) would facilitate a person’s actions in a

\textsuperscript{16} On this issue of consequentialism and friendship, see Scott Woodcock, “When Will Your Consequentialist Friend Abandon You for the Greater Good?”

\textsuperscript{17} This objection to Stocker’s argument will be further discussed in Chapter 4, where it will be argued that it is not convincing.
pluralistic world. Rietti would make some similar observations. “It is not clear,” she writes, “that a morality that made easier room for individual projects to take precedence over the general good, or for people to favour those to whom they are in close relationships, would necessarily be an improvement over one that favours greater impartiality.” She would also question whether a greater emphasis on subjectivity and personal motivation ultimately creates a healthier state: “It would have advantages impartialist approaches would not, for certain, but it would also have disadvantages of its own, and if bullets need to be bitten, it is not clear that biting the ‘who needs impartiality’ bullet is always the better option” (Rietti 366-67).

Unquestionably, Stocker poses a challenge to modern moral theory that deserves real attention. Nevertheless, those critics (Anscombe, Williams, and Stocker) of modern ethical theories offer no clear account of what a philosophy of psychology should look like. Certainly there is an issue regarding the lack of psychological realism in such theories, but one still has to be cautious regarding the replacement of modern moral theories without knowing whether the new approaches will offer a better solution. As Rietti nicely puts it, one should be concerned about “throwing the baby out with the bathwater in aiming to bring our moral demands closer to the supposed facts of human nature rather than vice-versa” (349). Here, Rietti seems to be seeking a middle ground in the gap that divides modern moral theories and moral psychology. The issue certainly gets more complex once it becomes unclear that subjecting modern ethical theories to a philosophy of psychology would be an acceptable solution. It can be agreed that the

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18 Roger Crisp and Michael Slote question the possibility of having a life without a divided moral psychology: “One may start wondering whether schizophrenia is inevitable and whether it is, in the end, such a very bad thing” (8).

19 Woodcock contends that impartiality is the only problem regarding Stocker’s challenge to modern ethical theories. He asserts that one can hold personal or special considerations and still fail to act out of friendship. See Woodcock (“Moral Schizophrenia” 7-8).
appeal to moral psychology is a valid one. Methodically, it becomes more blurry when such an appeal is interpreted as requiring either that moral theories be developed out of a moral psychology or, alternatively, that they should be subject to it.

“Out of” vs. “For the sake of”

As was already mentioned, Rietti and Woodcock argue that Stocker fails to provide evidence that a morally non-bifurcated agent would better navigate a world of pluralistic values than one with a morally divided life.²⁰ Moreover, Crisp and Slote ask that given the dimensions of Stocker’s dilemma whether such a non-divided ethical life is possible. In this discussion, however, it must be recognized that Stocker’s dilemma is not simply a question of the universal versus the particular, but a call for an understanding that modern ethical theories should serve as tools to improve the agent’s life. They should be about the ancient question how one should live given that a person hostage to an ethical theory will have a diminished sense of friendship, community, etc. Indeed, Stocker recognizes that universalism has its advantages: “In a social moral world where people are held to be different in significant moral ways because they are of a certain class, sex, race, … the universalist contract claim ‘I am the same as you’ is progressive, indeed, it is liberating” (Agent and Other” 219). His issue arises when universalism, taken in its moral theory, will ignore people. Rather than universalism being the problem, the issue is: do

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²⁰ Arguing that Stocker fails to provide evidence that a non-divided psychology is better than a divided one is not a cogent way to deal with his challenge. First, it would acknowledge that modern ethical theories suffer from a malady of spirit. Second, whether or not Stocker offers an acceptable solution is another issue, but his analysis has shed light on the problems with these theories. Finally, if a non-divided psychology were possible in ethical theories, it follows that a theory that avoids such malady would be preferable. Stocker’s own solution for this malady of spirit will be addressed in Chapter 4.
modern ethical theories offer tools to improve people’s lives or are they taking primacy over people?

In this regard Stocker would make a helpful distinction. In still another paper, he notes the difference between acting for the sake of friendship and acting out of friendship. The former concerns an action that places the quality of friendship itself, not the person, as the end. (Smith visits you because he wants to develop/maintain his friendship with you for any number of reasons, rather than visiting for your sake.) In this way, motives other than the person become the source of action and values. The alternative, to act out of …, concerns an action where friendship is not a goal; one acts for the sake of the friend, the person. As Stocker explains it, “my claim is that to act out of friendship is, first, not reducible to acting for the sake of friendship, and, second, is not reducible to acting for the sake of anything” (“Values and Purposes” 756). This does not mean that one cannot both act out of friendship and act for the sake of friendship. For instance, Smith can have a genuine desire to visit you for your sake and want simultaneously to develop/sustain the friendship. What cannot happen is that the former will cause the latter. It is harmony between one’s motives and one’s justifications that Stocker advances as the requirement for a good life.

Still, what I consider most important regarding Stocker’s objection to modern ethical theories are the dimensions through which one forms oneself as a subject of morality in reference to its normative force, its prescriptive factors. Be they overly demanding or not, modern ethical theories have their impact on the constitution of the subject who shapes the self to fit their demands. If Stocker is correct, modern ethical theories have a double problem. First, they cause a divided moral psychology within the agent;
There is, thus, great plausibility in taking as good what these theories advance as good. But when we try to act on the theories, try to embody their reasons in our motives – as opposed to simple seeing whether our or others’ lives would be approved of by the theories – then in a quite mad way, things start to go wrong. *The personalities of loved ones get passed over for their effects, moral action becomes self-stultifying and self-defeating.* (“Schizophrenia” 466; emphasis added)

There is perhaps an even greater problem. These theories become so controlling that they also produce subjects who miss out on such goods in life as love and friendship. As Stocker asserts,

And perhaps the greatest madnesses of all are – and they stand in a vicious interrelation – first, *the world is increasingly made such as to make these theories correct*; and, second, we take these theories to be correct and thus come to see love, friendship, and the like only as possible, and not very certain, sources of pleasure or whatever. (“Schizophrenia” 466; emphasis added)

Specifically, to act on the reasoning underlying modern ethical theories diminishes goods such as love, friendship, and community. What this chapter has discussed in large measure is the split between one’s reasons and one’s motives that this devaluing creates.

Concerning Stocker’s second point, there is, as he warns, a tendency to make modern ethical theories correct, if not supreme. Agents seek to shape themselves to conform to the reasoning of these theories which leads them to discount their loved ones, and therefore causes a conflict. Smith shapes himself to conform to utilitarian/deontic reasoning, but his exposition of that reasoning brings you both to realize that there is a divide between his reasons and his
motives for visiting. Once he experiences the unpleasant reality of a divided moral psychology, it can be inferred that Smith has cared for his ethical theory because of its promise of the good. The problem, as has been seen in Wolf’s earlier comment, is not the action that the theory engenders but the effects of an absolute commitment to the theory itself. As Stocker has emphasized, subjects give primacy to these theories over their lives when such theories should be tools for the improvement of their lives.

Conclusion

This chapter began by taking up two challenges. The first was that of Elizabeth Anscombe that it is currently impossible to do moral philosophy, since we lack a philosophy of psychology. The second was the related challenge of Michael Stocker that modern ethical theories in fact create a moral psychology that is divided. Most of the attention in the chapter was focused on the latter, in particular Stocker’s challenge to Kantian and utilitarian theories of morality.

Using Stocker’s example of Smith’s visit to a friend, it was seen that both Kantianism and utilitarianism succumb to Stocker’s malady of the spirit. Smith’s reason for his action and his motive for visiting the friend will be at variance. His deontic and consequentialist rationales would simply ignore the friend as motive, and in doing so they devalue the friendship and produce a moral psyche where reason and motive vary. Stocker’s main point is whether one will treat the friend as an instrument to achieve some prescribed goal. He makes a distinction between acting “out of” and “for the sake of” something. With regard to the example of Smith’s visit, an acceptable solution would be if Smith acts out of friendship and for the sake of the friend as his motive for the visit.
Moreover, this chapter went on to nuance the complexity of Stocker’s challenge aiming to explain that it is not merely a question of impartiality or demandingness, but whether or not one can have goods such as friendship, love, and sense of community as the source of motives. Since such goods are highly valued and vital to a social (good) life, Stocker asserts that the disharmony that modern ethical theories create is a serious problem, indeed, a malady of spirit. Such systems have a two-fold problem: they diminish such essential personal and social goods, and they create divided moral psychologies. More than that, their pervasiveness creates a hold on life: life is shaped to fit the theory, rather than the theory being used to improve life.

Since Stocker’s paper clearly addresses deontic and utilitarian rationales, the present chapter deals directly only with these two modern moral theories. Nevertheless, because it is quite distinct in its rationale, with a much more personal approach, virtue ethics was left to the next chapter. The issue is whether it too succumbs to Stocker’s critique.
Chapter 3

Virtue Ethics: a Solution?

The previous chapter demonstrated that because they lacked plausible accounts of psychological realism, both Kantianism and utilitarianism present serious difficulties in dealing with Stocker’s challenge, that is, that modern moral theories can create a divided moral psychology and can indeed pervade the whole of human life. Both approaches succumb to Stocker’s indictment that modern ethical theories produce a split between one’s motives and one’s reasons. This shortcoming has paved the way for the revival of contemporary virtue ethics theories. One should recall that Anscombe, however unclearly, suggested an Aristotelian ethics of virtue as a starting point for a viable ethical theory, and it is this that inspired philosophers to consider a moral theory focused on virtue. Effectively, Anscombe gave advantage to virtue ethics over its competitors.\(^\text{21}\) In any consideration here, it would be essential that philosophers put forward a

\(^{21}\) Schneewind amplifies on Anscombe’s transition between Aristotle to us in setting out some of the historical misfortunes of virtue ethics. He argues that virtue ethics was neglected by philosophers because it had to face internal problems. He contends that “Christianity … teaches a morality of duty, not of virtue, and it understands duty in terms of acts complying with law” (181). Schneewind asserts that from this deontic culture, Hugo Grotius criticized Aristotle’s idea that the motive of the agent is important in assessing the morality of an action. Schneewind holds that for Grotius, “The motive of the just agent does not matter. To be just is simply to have the habit of following right reason with respect to the rights of others” (183). This was a misfortune for virtue ethics, since an act-centred approach rendered the virtues as instrumental. Even David Hume’s natural and artificial virtues approach was of no help. In Schneewind’s words, “Adam Smith shows in a particular clear way the vulnerability of Hume’s virtue-centred ethic when it is faced with a demand for clear and definite moral guidance” (194). This created a second misfortune for virtue ethics, especially since the political context favored legalism. Finally, Schneewind holds that a further misfortune came from Kantianism, since it could only give the virtues a secondary
coherent account of virtue/human nature/flourishing, establishing the interconnection among them. This might allow the possibility that virtue ethics, due to its agent-centred characteristics, could resurface as an alternative to Kantian or utilitarian approaches. Rather than formulating a decision-making procedure to be generally applied to situations, virtue ethics could focus on the agent’s capacity to deal with moral states of affairs that cannot be predicted and therefore could not be codified. This raised the possibility that the non-codified characteristic of an ethics of virtue could offer a solution to Stocker’s diagnosis of a malady of spirit in moral philosophy. Can virtue ethics indeed avoid a divided psychology? If it can, at what expense?

This chapter discusses what virtue ethics might offer by way of addressing Stocker’s malady of spirit objection to modern ethical theories. After addressing some basic concepts, I examine two answers that mainstream virtue ethics theories might give in the case of Stocker’s example of Smith’s visits. These submit that Smith could either appeal to a virtuous exemplar or, alternatively, that he might be acting out of virtue as the rationale for his visiting. Then, taking into consideration that virtue ethics itself presents different versions of an ethic of virtue, I slightly modify Stocker’s example for the purpose of shedding light on some flaws behind the reasoning of virtue ethics. To conclude, I dispute the claim that virtue ethics would be immune to the criticism of a split between one’s reasons and one’s emotions.

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role. For him, in Kant’s deontic theory, “virtue has at best partial role to play in morality, dividing the realm with perfect and imperfect duties which are the archetype of everything the virtue theorist rejects” (Schneewind 199).
Virtue Ethics: Three Main Factors

Virtue ethics focuses on the moral character of an agent and the agent’s relevant virtues as essential features for the moral evaluation of an action. Although there are variants, virtue ethics in its broadest sense concentrates on the relationship between the agent and virtue. Rosalind Hursthouse and Glen Pettigrove suggest that “almost any modern version still shows that its roots are in ancient Greek philosophy by the employment of three concepts derived from it. These are arête (excellence or virtue), pronesis (practical or moral wisdom), and eudaimonia (usually translated as happiness and flourishing)” (“Virtue Ethics” 3). Importantly, the arrangement of these factors plays a central role in differentiating approaches within virtue ethics. For example, one approach can give primacy to the virtue and/or the virtuous person while another can explain virtues by reference to an account of human flourishing as the ultimate goal. Before addressing how virtue ethics might reply to Stocker’s argument, it seems necessary here to discuss briefly both the three foundational factors and the normative structure of virtue ethics.

A virtue is commonly defined as an excellent characteristic that an entity possesses pursuant to its purpose. It is customary to use the Aristotelian illustration that the virtue of a knife is sharpness. This implies that it is the purpose of a knife from which one can derive a concept of its virtue. For Aristotle, “the virtues are neither passions nor faculties, all that remains is that they should be states of character” (1106a10; [957]). This identifies the key characteristic of a virtue as being a disposition. As Julia Annas puts it, “A virtue is also a

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22 For an historical analysis in greater depth of the views about virtue in Ancient Greece, see T. H. Irwin’s “Theory and Common Sense in Greek Philosophy.” Irwin sheds light on the similarities, and to some extent the differences, that exist among Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics regarding a theory of virtue.
reliable disposition. If Jane is generous, it is no accident she does the generous action and has generous feeling” (Intelligent Virtue, 9). Here, it is important to stress that such a reliable disposition in manifesting virtues gives consistency to one’s actions, which defines a person as virtuous. A virtue differs from a skill. Unlike the latter, which can be performed without any emotion, a virtuous action is determined by the agent’s intention/feeling: “The virtuous person not only does the right thing for the right reason, she has the right feeling about it” (Annas, Intelligent Virtue 66).

Consequently, a definition of virtue touches on the agent’s disposition, feelings, and reasoning. Indeed, Julia Driver asserts: “A moral virtue is a character trait. It is a complex psychological disposition to feel, behave, or act well” (124). This sophisticated definition encapsulates the main characteristics of a virtue. Obviously, there can be disagreements concerning not only the arrangement of such characteristics but also about the intrinsic qualities of virtue itself. Do the virtues have primacy? Are they only instrumentally valuable? Do circumstances dictate and guide the virtues? Does the agent’s intention really matter? Obviously these questions imply distinctive theories of virtue ethics that would be beyond the scope of this project to consider. They are examined briefly here only when they add light to the discussion regarding Stocker’s dilemma.

*Phronesis* (practical wisdom) is a second crucial factor in virtue ethics. Indeed, for the Greek moralists, the virtues have a special feature that distinguishes them from other qualities. As T. H. Irwin argues, “The Greek moralists, however, believe that if we simply list the virtues among assets or resources, we have not captured the distinctive feature of the virtues that ‘completes’ or ‘perfects’ us” (41). This distinctive characteristic of the virtues lies in an active process where there is a development “to perfect” us. Here, Aristotle makes a distinction between natural virtue and virtue in the strict sense. He holds that “the latter involves practical
wisdom” (1144b15; [1035]). Natural virtue is a potentiality that can be developed by phronesis; on the other hand, virtue in the strict sense is the real/full virtue that implies phronesis. In other words, if “A” possesses natural virtue, it does not imply that “A” has practical wisdom. But if “B” possesses the virtue in the strict sense, it follows that “B” has achieved practical wisdom.

Aristotle also clarifies the role of reason in practical wisdom. For example, he asserts that children and brutes can have a natural disposition to be brave, but without reason such bravery can be harmful (1144b5-10; [1035]). Indeed, one can consider two naturally brave people: John is a university student and athlete; and Ken is a police officer who has tactical experience. Both live alone. Suppose that each one faces the same situation of a thief who has broken into his home. When John and Ken arrive home, the neighbours tell them that there is someone inside. John might confront the thief bravely without questioning whether the thief is armed while also lacking the practical knowledge of deliberative entry. John will likely get hurt. On the other hand, Ken would consider the circumstances based on his practical knowledge. Applying practical wisdom to the situation, reason would control his bravery. He would likely call for a police backup. This example indicates the importance of practical wisdom as the necessary and sufficient feature of virtue, taking the full Aristotelian meaning of that term. It illustrates the claim of Aristotle that, “the work of man is achieved only in accordance with practical wisdom as well as with moral virtue; for virtue makes us aim at the right mark, and practical wisdom makes us take the right means” (1144a7-9; [1034]). While both John and Ken aim at the right end (to get rid of the thief), phronesis not only makes Ken take the right means but also reveals who has the virtue in Aristotle’s strict sense.

In such an Aristotelian account, one has to have the right disposition (potentiality). Then, during the process of acquiring right habits from childhood reason is developed. Finally, there emerges practical wisdom, which implies real/full virtue. The difficulty comes from thinking
that virtues automatically imply *phronesis*, when, as Aristotle warns, virtue exists in two distinct types:

This is why some say that all the virtues are forms of practical wisdom, and why Socrates in one respect was on the right track while in another he went astray; in thinking that all the virtues were forms of practical wisdom he was wrong, but in saying they implied practical wisdom he was right. (1144b17-21; [1035])

We can consider the following statements as representing the views of Aristotle:

(P) Potential to become a *phronomos*: free males

(NV) Natural virtue = a disposition that one is born with

(H) Habits: practicing the right habits from childhood

(V) Virtue in the strict sense = a disposition one has developed through *phronesis*

(PH) *Phronesis* = the state that manifests the virtue in the strict sense.

When one fulfills P, NV, and H, the following propositions are possible:

1. It is the case that: V→PH and PH→V, so V↔PH

2. It is not the case that: NV→PH

Thus, Aristotle argues that Socrates made a mistake by saying that all virtues (V and NV) were forms of *phronesis*, when only “1” (that virtue in the strict sense implies practical wisdom) is true.

The Aristotelian account is undoubtedly elitist and perfectionist. First, “P” implies only free males, which means Aristotle excludes woman and slaves. Indeed, he would exclude even

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23 Aristotle’s account is perfectionist due to his rigid hierarchy: the virtuous man, the continent man, the incontinent man, and the vicious man. The virtuous man does not undergo internal struggles to perform the morally right action.
un-propertied free males. Still, an obvious solution is to make “P” largely inclusive by conceiving of all human beings as equals. While this is a step forward, Susan Moller Okin would argue that an Aristotelian approach and some modern virtue ethics ones should pay greater attention also to feminist values. Okin offers some historical background to Aristotle’s notion of virtue:

The word arete, itself is derived from aner, meaning ‘man’ differentiated from ‘woman’. Only qualified and inferior forms of arete, having to do with performing their respective supportive and subservient functions well, attach to women, slaves, and those free males who are unsuited, for whatever reason, to be heroes. (212)

This is not only an issue about the meaning of the word arete, but a call for an approach that would take into account non-masculine virtues. Since “H” implies education, she contends that even an adapted Aristotelian approach[^24] must address the fact that “women do far more than men to promote the day-to-day material and psychological flourishing of others, and that this promotion of the flourishing of others is not infrequently done at the expense of some aspects of their own flourishing” (Okin 227). It is true that “H” can be adjusted to a concept of education in

[^24]: Okin herself would include even such contemporary approaches as Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* (an account of virtue that relies on practices constituted by moral tradition).
accordance with one’s culture or community. However, Okin’s argument is crucial if one tries to avoid an aristocratic account of virtue simply by conceiving of human beings as equal.

_Eudaimonia_ is the third important element in virtue ethics theory. Generally translated as happiness, in Aristotelian ethics it is considered as the ultimate goal. Irwin argues that “an eudaemonist must regard virtue as the best state for promoting the agent’s happiness” (42). This creates a constraint where the pursuit of happiness becomes the goal of a virtuous man. Indeed, Irwin affirms that Socrates, the Stoics, Plato, and Aristotle “agree on a ‘eudaemonist constraint’ on virtue” (42). This, however, creates an issue within virtue ethics in terms of the primacy of virtue, i.e., whether the role of virtue becomes instrumental in the service of happiness. Annas submits that ethical reflection on how one’s life is developing in the light of an unspecific _telos_ of a happy life is central to _eudaimonia_. Although contemporary concepts of _eudaimonia_ are derived from ancient theories, she would argue that the common point is the pursuit of happiness: “Eudaimonist theories, ancient or contemporary, give happiness the central role of the intersection of everyday ethical thinking and ethical theory” (Annas, _Intelligent Virtue_ 125). Still, an obvious difficulty with _eudaimonia_ is that happiness is a subjective concept, which means that it can vary according to culture and various personal circumstances.

Annas deals with the “subjective objection” to the concept of happiness by asserting that in a _eudaimonist_ sense it is a way of working on one’s life aiming to live well. This inherently involves a relationship with others:

Happiness on this account is not a matter of my feelings, or something to be achieved without reference to other people. We are all seeking happiness, explicitly or not, because we are all working on our lives; there is more to achieving happiness than just feeling a certain way, or getting what you want, and there are better and worse ways of living your life. (_Intelligent Virtue_ 144)
Annas’s notion of *eudaimonia* consequently implies an understanding that happiness has both objective and (in her view, perhaps to a lesser extent) subjective dimensions, both of these being inter-related.

Indeed, contemporary accounts of *eudaimonia* can offer a plausible solution to such an objection. Writing on egalitarianism and human flourishing, Christine Sypnowich puts forward an understanding of human flourishing as “a partly subjective, partly objective criterion” (221). Her concept of flourishing has three constituents:

The constituents of flourishing can be grouped into three categories. First, there is the ability to choose, as much as is possible given degrees of mental competence, how to live; for most peoples, a non-autonomous life falls short as a flourishing existence. A second constituent of wellbeing is objectively worthwhile pursuits, for there are better and worse ways of living and even the freely chosen pursuit can be defective. Finally, personal contentment is an important feature of flourishing, since freely chosen objective pursuits are inadequate sources of wellbeing if the person derives no pleasure or fulfilment from them. (Sypnowich 140)

Given Sypnowich’s explanation, an interpretation would be that autonomy and personal contentment would preserve the subjective factor of one’s happiness while “objectively worthwhile pursuits” would act as an ethical constraint as how one should live. While her constituents (mainly autonomy) can lead to disagreements within (political) philosophy, they seem to offer a plausible way of dealing with the so-called “subjective objection” to *eudaimonia*.

All three factors discussed above (virtue, practical wisdom and flourishing) are of supreme importance in virtue ethics. Despite the fact that they have their roots in ancient
philosophy, contemporary virtue ethics theories continue to be shaped by them. The application of these factors, however, must be considered in the light of virtue ethics normative structure.

**Virtue Ethics: Basic Normative Structure**

As compared with utilitarianism and Kantianism, virtue ethics enjoys the advantage of being a more “flexible” normative theory. It is primarily agent-centred, which means that it focuses on the character of the agent instead of focusing on the good and right action, as does act-centered theory. In other words, while utilitarianism relies on consequences, and Kantianism on duties, virtue ethics emphasizes the moral character and/or the virtues of the agent. This is not to say that virtue ethics cannot include elements such as duty and teleological reasoning. Similarly, a utilitarian can allow room for virtue if its use can bring about the best outcome, and a Kantian can allow for virtue as an instrument directed to one’s perfect duty. The distinction lies in how each theory grounds its rationale. A virtue ethicist holds an agent’s virtues as intrinsically valuable and holds that from these intrinsic characteristics the normative force of virtue ethics is derived.

Schneewind contends that action-centred ethics theories like Kantianism and utilitarianism embrace the virtues in an instrumental way to the extent that virtues can be subject to the deontic principles or bring about the best outcome. As a result, “if a virtue-centred ethics is to be significantly different from an act-centred ethics, it needs to show that the virtues which

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25 For Kant, “Virtue signifies a moral strength of the will. But this does not exhaust the concept; for such strength could also belong to a *holy* (superhuman) being, in whom no hindering impulses would impede the law of its will and who would thus gladly do everything in conformity with the law. Virtue is, therefore, the moral strength of a *human being’s* will in fulfilling his *duty*, a moral *constraint* through his own lawgiving reason, insofar as this constitutes itself an authority *executing* the law” (6:405 [503]). Virtue is consequently secondary to duty.
are most important to morality have a life of their own, which is independent of rules or laws” (Schneewind 180). This agent-centered feature of virtue ethics creates its normative structure and fundamentally differentiates it from Kantianism or utilitarianism. Hurthhouse observes that while all three theories may agree that I should help someone, they would disagree as to why:

A utilitarian will emphasize the fact that the consequences of doing so will maximize well-being, a deontologist will emphasize the fact that, in doing so, I will be acting in accordance with a moral rule such as ‘Do unto others as you would be done by’, and a virtue ethicist will emphasize the fact that helping the person would be charitable or benevolent. (*On Virtue Ethics* 1)

Her final phrase provides a summary of virtue ethics theory. From this perspective, for a virtuous person the morally right action is determined and motivated by a virtue such as charity or benevolence. Its focus is virtue itself.26

**Virtue Ethics: Two Standard Answers**

Under a virtue ethics lens, Smith’s answer referred to earlier could vary in at least two key ways. First, (a) by his taking into account that the morally right action is determined by the idea of a virtuous exemplar, either in an Aristotelian perfectionist narrative as the *phronemos* or from a newer non-perfectionist version27 that would still require an exemplar. Second, (b) Smith could understand that the morally right action would be determined by a virtue as both something intrinsic and as a point of departure for the action but without positing an exemplar. Instead of

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26 There are clearly different forms of virtue ethics, e.g. *eudaimonist*, agent-based, and agent-centred virtue ethics. Although differentiating them in greater detail is immaterial for my purposes, they will be discussed, to the extent that is needed, in the next sections.

27 See below.
imagining how a virtuous agent would act, Smith would rely on the virtue of friendship itself as a way to connect his motives and his moral action. Here, however, my suggestion would be that (a) can lead to the same conflicted psychology as is produced by Kantianism or utilitarianism, while (b) seems to offer the best possibility to rescue the friendship – although not without some conflicts if the person whom Smith goes to visit is a quasi-Socratic.

If we turn to a modified version of Stocker’s example of Smith’s visit, we can better examine what these alternative answers can offer. Supposing that in Stocker’s example you and Smith have a slightly different conversation. When Smith enters the hospital room, you thank him for his visit. He says to you in reply:

No problem, my friend. You know you can always count on me. I have been visiting people in hospital since I was an undergraduate, as you know. When I heard you were here, why should I not see you, since I have visited people I do not even know? I am glad that my duty overlaps with my special obligation as your friend. As human beings, visiting the sick is our duty which is determined by our good nature that everyone possesses. You are right that since we were classmates, I have been trying to be virtuous, because this is the only way we can contribute to having a better world. There are so many bad influences in this world, and I want to be one who cultivates virtues. That’s why I am here, my friend! You do not need to thank me. What I am doing is what any good human being would do in this situation.

Would Smith’s explanation save your friendship?

Answer (a): Appealing to the virtuous exemplar

Smith’s (a)-type answer (appealing to an exemplar) would hardly avoid the tension that Stocker criticizes. Indeed, Smith’s answer here falls into a deontic and consequentialist
rationale. On one hand, he believes that visiting the sick in hospital is his duty (as determined by human nature, which is good). As he tells you, he has even visited strangers. As it happens, in your case as his sick friend, his duty of visiting the sick overlaps with his special obligation. Still, his action is motivated by a deontic rationale that makes you secondary. If one takes up instead the second part of his answer, Smith has been trying to be virtuous with the aim of creating a better world, which is a consequentialist rationale. Here, similarly to a deontic rationale, his visit is motivated by the consequences of his actions, which once again puts his friendship with you as secondary.

The fact that Smith’s virtuous answer here also embraces both deontology and utilitarianism is because the overall structure of normative ethics can allow a complex interconnection between the two theories in real terms. Nonetheless, Gary Watson, focusing on its normative structure, would distinguish virtue ethics from both theories by asserting that virtue ethics takes virtue to be the ultimate moral worth:

On an ethics of virtue, however, there is not even the appearance of a problem. For the value of virtue is not said to come from the value of anything else at all. Although it is a teleological view, an ethics of virtue can acknowledge “deontological” reasons without paradox, because it is not an ethics of outcome. (460)

28 According to Shelly Kagan, “at the level of the normative factors themselves, rule utilitarianism does not support a utilitarian theory, but rather a deontology one” (233). Moreover, this also happens with contractarianism, which at the level of normative factors seeks to maximize the utility of the society. What Kagan suggests in his analysis is that while normative ethics theories are commonly thought to be distinguished and exclusive, practice evidences that such theories may have elements that overlap.
For Watson, explanatory primacy\textsuperscript{29} is the factor that distinguishes virtue ethics from deontology and consequentialism. Instead of focusing on the good and right (act-centered theory), virtue ethics relies on moral worth itself, the teleological aspect of human beings who wish to flourish. In other words, there is a “constraint” in virtue ethics that it derives from character; the good and the right (act-centered) actions are a result of virtue itself, not the reverse. This explains why Smith’s rationale for visiting you may resemble deontic and teleological reasoning but is nevertheless a virtue ethics rationale.

Nevertheless, a third factor is inherent in Smith’s concluding sentence (“\textit{What I am doing is what any good friend would do in this situation}”). This in fact is a version of virtue ethics that appeals to the ideal of an exemplar from which Smith derives his normative reasoning. In other words, “an action is right if it is what a virtuous agent would do in the circumstances” (Hursthouse, “Virtue Theory” 225). By appealing to the exemplar of “any good friend,” Smith’s integrity is put in second place and you in third, which is unlikely to save your friendship. It is true that Hursthouse presents a “light” codifiability version of virtue ethics which not only gives guidance as v-rules,\textsuperscript{30} but also maintains some flexibility by allowing the agent, when required, to have priority over the circumstances. Nevertheless, this fails to avoid a split between one’s reasons and one’s emotions since now the reason for Smith’s visit lies in the exemplar or v-rules, but still does not become an action out of friendship.

\textsuperscript{29} Watson holds that a straightforward way to describe explanatory primacy is “to explain right conduct as what accords with the virtues.” In this case, virtue “must be intelligible independently of the notion of right conduct” (451-452).

\textsuperscript{30} Hursthouse claims that virtue ethics may generate v-rules such as “do what is charitable.” However, these rules are flexible in determining the morality of an action in any particular case, rather than having the strong codification of deontology and utilitarianism (\textit{On Virtue Ethics} 32).
In this situation, even a non-codified version of virtue ethics would seem incapable of saving friendship. John McDowell, for example, sets forth a sophisticated non-codified account of virtue ethics. Conceiving of virtue as knowledge, he contends that there are requirements imposed upon the agent by the situation. If the agent has a perceptual capacity (sensitivity) to identify these requirements, this will provide the reasons for acting. For McDowell, \(^3\) “the concept of the virtue is the concept of a state whose possession accounts for the actions which manifest it. Since the explanatory role is filled by the sensitivity, the sensitivity turns out to be what virtue is” (143). It is significant that his conception of rationality precludes a universal action guide that can be applied in any particular case. Instead, McDowell reads Aristotle’s suggestion of a virtuous exemplar as a practical syllogism where the major premise (the virtuous person’s concept of how one should live a good life) cannot be considered a universal determinant principle as in the act-centred theories. If the major premise, as a general constraint, is in McDowell’s phrase “the virtuous person’s conception of the sort of life a human being should lead” (156), the minor premise deals with the particular situations in which one finds oneself: “Occasion by occasion, one knows what to do, if one does, not by applying universal principles but by being a certain kind of person: one who sees situations in a certain distinctive way” (McDowell 162). Thus, rather than having a priori guiding-principle waiting to be applied to any particular situation, one has to perceive the requirement that the situation imposes and deal with it according to the perceived reasons for acting virtuously.

\(^3\) McDowell’s approach implies that there are reasons for action. Such reasons do not depend on one’s desire/will. In this sense, evaluating the same action performed by either a virtuous person or an incontinent person will involve asking whether it is rational or irrational. Hence, acting out of virtue means that one will identify the reasons for acting virtuously and act accordingly.
Although McDowell’s account avoids codifiability, there remains in the background a general principle of how a virtuous person would lead his or her life. As a result, Smith’s reply would consider as its rationale the ‘constraint’ of the sort of life a human being should lead from the perspective of a virtuous person. This motive does nothing to save your friendship, for it still means you are not the primary motive for his visit. Indeed, the problem is that once there is a notion, be it general or specific, determining what makes an action right, then Stocker’s malady of spirit issue arises once more. In McDowell’s practical syllogism, not only is the major premise problematic, but also the idea that there are independent reasons for acting virtuously. Thus, the rationale behind his explanation does not embody one’s reasons in one’s emotions but continues to create a divided psychology.

*Answer (b): Acting Out of Virtue*

Smith’s (b)-type answer would read like this:

The reason for my visit is because you are my friend and I love you, my dear friend! I am here for the sake of the virtue called friendship.

This would at first appear to be acceptable in terms of friendship since the motives are derived from the virtue itself. As Robert B. Louden puts it, “The agent who correctly acts from the disposition of charity does so (according to the virtue theorist) not because it maximizes utility or because it is one’s duty to do so, but rather out of a commitment to the value of charity for its own sake” (204). Still, as was discussed in the previous chapter, Stocker asserts that “to act out of friendship is, first, not reducible to acting for the sake of friendship, and, second, is not reducible to acting for the sake of anything” (“Values and Purposes” 756). In other words, Smith’s (b)-type answer must avoid putting you as secondary by deriving his motives and reasons, in a harmonic way, from the virtue called friendship. Smith expresses that he loves you; this is not only his motive for visiting you but also his reason.
Nevertheless, Smith’s (b)-type answer can lead to another dilemma. Supposing that you were a quasi-Socratic and raised the *Euthyphro* dilemma as follows: “Do you love me because of the virtue of friendship itself or because my friendship offers you other benefits (be they material or sentimental) which makes you feel good?” The answer that would close the discussion would be the Socratic answer reconciling the action as both instrumental and intrinsic. Still, most virtue ethics theories cannot give such an answer unless they fall prey to Watson’s dilemma. According to Watson, “any ethics of virtue that lacks a theory of virtue will be nonexplanatory, but any ethics of virtue that has such a theory will collapse into ethics of outcome” (456). In other words, if on one hand one seeks to explain virtue as primary, then one must explain what virtue is. This seems problematic, since explaining virtues requires reference to something (flourishing, happiness). On the other hand, once one explains virtue in terms of another referent, virtue no longer has primacy and becomes instrumental, secondary. Unless one deals with Watson’s dilemma, virtue ethics cannot avoid Stocker’s malady of spirit.

Some have attempted to resolve this issue. Jason Kawall defends the primacy of virtue by asserting that a virtue responds to the situations while maintaining its primacy. He argues that “the virtues will often lead us to value certain outcomes but, according to the virtue theorist, the moral status of these outcomes is determined by the reactions and attitudes of the virtuous” (11-12). Kawall’s argument implies that although virtue reacts to a situation, it is not the case of the situation guiding the reaction of the virtue as if the situation had *a priori* moral properties. In the latter case virtue would be secondary. That leaves open the issue of how one can know and express the virtues? Kawall seems to rely on a spontaneity that enables him not to render virtue as secondary: “We could appeal to those traits that we would value in people, in light of full information. Again, this would allow us to pick out traits as virtues without assuming
explanatorily prior morally right actions or good states of affairs” (20). This explanation, however, leaves totally unclear how it is possible to pick out such virtues, let alone to know whether a person/action is virtuous. Kawall does not provide a theory of virtue which means he leaves it as non-explanatory.

Michael Slote seeks to avoid the collapse of virtue ethics into an ethics of outcome by developing an agent-based approach. His account “treats the moral or ethical status of acts as entirely derivative from independent and fundamental aretaic (as opposed to deontic) ethical characterization of motives, character traits, or individuals” (239). In fact, Slote’s agent-based virtue ethics would offer a solution to Stocker’s malady of spirit since Smith’s motive would be derived from an aretaic consideration such as friendship without rendering you as the friend instrumentally. For him, an action is morally right if it conforms to one’s motives when performing such an action: acting virtuously is to act out of a good motive/disposition. Nevertheless, like Kawall, Slote does not provide an account of virtue. Consequently, he, too, cannot pass Watson’s test. It is true that his account does not collapse into an ethic of outcome. However, this comes at the expense of leaving virtue as non-explanatory, which means that he must fall on the first horn of Watson’s dilemma.

Either alternative of Watson’s dilemma can force virtue ethics to succumb to Stocker’s challenge to modern ethical theories. If virtue has primacy, and is thus non-explanatory, it cannot be understood as a rationale to motivate agents to act in a certain way. In other words, virtue ethics lacks an explanatory theory. If virtue is explanatory, it has to be justified by reference to some other thing. Here it will collapse into an ethics of outcome, and thus submit to
Stocker’s objection, just as utilitarianism does.\textsuperscript{32} Everything considered, virtue ethics theory cannot be of much more help than deontology or utilitarianism in rescuing friendship

As Watson’s dilemma demonstrates, virtue ethics suffers from problems akin to those that beset utilitarianism and Kantianism. It, too, is not immune to Stocker’s criticism of malady of spirit. As one author puts it, “the conversation will not yield a reason to prefer virtue ethics to its best-known rivals. Stocker’s argument, and considerations of self-effacement generally, are not good news for virtue ethics” (Keller 231). Moreover, as indicated in the previous chapter, an additional objection that I would consider central to Stocker’s argument is how modern ethical theories act as regards the constitution of the self. Since all three approaches are self-effacing, the fact that agents shape themselves to fit the theories implies that “The personalities of loved ones get passed over for their effects” (Stocker, “Schizophrenia” 466). As a result, modern ethical theories not only fail to embody reasons with emotions. Since they dominate ethical thoughts and dictate personal action, they also produce psychologically divided identities.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed how virtue ethics performed in being able to deal with Stocker’s challenge to modern ethical theories. Although some assume that Stocker’s arguments apply only to deontology and utilitarianism since those are action-centred theories, virtue ethics does not escape. Despite its “flexibility” regarding codifiability, virtue ethics cannot prevent a divided psychology within the agent. In Smith’s example, if he appeals to a virtuous exemplar version of

\textsuperscript{32} A further problem that can be raised if virtue is conceived as secondary is the issue of cultural relativism. For an account of virtue as grounded on practices which vary in accord with social values, see Alasdair MacIntyre’s \textit{After Virtue}. 
virtue ethics, he deems you as secondary causing the split between his reasons and his motives. If he acts out such a virtue as friendship, his reasoning shifts to giving primacy to the virtues. This must come at the expense of submitting to a devastating predicament identified by Watson: if a theory of virtue holds the primacy of virtue, then virtue is non-explanatory; if it is explanatory, the theory of virtue collapses into a theory of outcome. In the face of this, virtue ethics joins Kantianism and utilitarianism as ethical theories which succumb to Stocker’s challenge.

Moreover, all self-effacing ethical theories have an impact on the constitution of the ethical agent. Since subjects mold themselves to conform to the normative structures of those theories, another malady of spirit is that the process creates psychological conflicts in which goods like friendship, community, love, and personal projects get passed over. Rather than serving as tools whose aim is to help human beings to live well, modern ethical theories seem to have achieved a state of primacy over the ethical agents. This seems in sharp contrast to the wisdom of ancient philosophers whose main question was not how one should act, but how should one live? If the hypothesis of a difference between the ages is significant, a genealogical approach may shed light on how it developed, as well as on the relevance of the history of thought to modern ethical theories. However, before considering this, the next chapter will further examine some of the implications of the various critiques of such theories.
Chapter 4

Is Malady of Spirit Inevitable?

In Chapter 3, a case was made that virtue ethics, which appears to be immune to Stocker’s challenge, fails to offer a convincing solution. Virtue ethics must join both utilitarianism and deontology (discussed in Chapter 2) as ethical theories that are self-defeating, unable to provide the agent with a motive for action without creating a divide between one’s reason and one’s motive. As a result, one is left to consider the following positions: a) since Stocker’s challenge shows that all three theories are self-effacing, and since one does not know whether a non-divided psychology is any better than a divided one, one should simply ignore his objection; b) perhaps, as both Williams and Wolf argue, there are situations that lie beyond justification, so that morality should play a legitimate part in, but not dominate, ethical thought; c) one can look elsewhere for an ethical approach that can circumvent Stocker’s challenge. The present chapter will examine the first two of these alternatives with the aim of arguing against “a)” and for “b)”. This will set the stage for considering in Chapter 5 Foucault’s aesthetic of existence as a possibility to fit the criteria of alternative “c)”, thus avoiding Stocker’s dilemma.

I will give reasons for rejecting a solution that would ignore Stocker’s problem of malady of spirit and therefore allow a place for self-effacing ethical theories. I also discuss Stocker’s own suggestion for curing malady of spirit, which I take to be inadequate because it does not deal with the effect of such theories on the agent. Having done this, I attempt to analyse the peculiarity of the pervasiveness of modern ethical theories by which one makes an absolute commitment to morality. Finally, I argue that a feasible remedy for Stocker’s dilemma must be an ethical approach that can resist the pervasive characteristic of moral systems – that is

33 Note that “b)” and “c)” are not necessarily mutually exclusive.
the aim to establish an impersonal rule – and thus open up the possibility of reconciling one’s reason with one’s motives.

Rejecting Self-Effacing Ethical Theories

As mentioned in Chapter 2, some would contend that Stocker’s diagnosis of modern ethical theories as producing a malady of spirit, while it may be valid, can be ignored because he does not establish that a non-divided psychology is a better situation. Woodcock argues that “Stocker fails to put his own alternative forward for the purpose of comparison” (“Moral Schizophrenia” 17). He maintains that Stocker does not establish that a person with a morally coherent psyche would have a better quality of life than a person with a divided one, or that a unified psychology would facilitate an agent’s actions in a pluralistic world. Rietti makes similar observations. She is unconvinced “that a morality that made easier room for individual projects to take precedence over the general good … would necessarily be an improvement over one that favours greater impartiality.” She questions also whether a greater emphasis on subjectivity and personal motivation ultimately creates a healthier state for the person. While each approach has its advantages and disadvantages, it is unclear to her that one is superior (Rietti 366-67).

However, both Rietti and Woodcock are off-target in dealing with the core of the problem, which remains the conflict between what one’s moral rationale prescribes as a justification and one’s actual motives in performing an action. If such a good as friendship/love cannot be practiced in line with what a moral theory demands so that either moral action or personal attachments, but not both, can be realized, simply asserting that such a discordant life may be problematic is unpersuasive. Why should one be content with an ethical theory that diminishes goods like friendship, community, and personal relationships when such goods are
the very fabric of a human life? What are the real consequences of embracing, even implicitly, a malady of spirit?

The basic flaw is that both Woodcock and Rietti seek to compare the general concept of a bifurcated life to that of a non-bifurcated one without close examination of what is involved in either. Once one unpacks Stocker’s argument, the nuances show just how unpalatable it would be to embrace any self-effacing approaches. For the purposes of discussion, one can consider the following factors:

(R) = Reasons that modern ethical theories prescribe for one’s action.
(M) = One’s motives for acting.
(G) = Goods like friendship, love, affection, fellow-feeling, and sense of community.
(S) = Split between one’s reasons (R) and one’s motives (M).

If one follows Stocker’s line of thinking, one would have to consider that Motives (M) can be derived directly from either Reasons (R) or from Goods (G). Consequently, it would follow that Stocker’s objections to self-effacing approaches are due to the following considerations:

i- One is deriving M from R in cases when G instead should be M’s source. Recalling the example of Smith, his M for visiting you was derived from R. Once he realized that deriving M from R would put G (friendship/you) as secondary, he might attempt to repair the situation. To do so, however, he must modify or give up R. This creates a bifurcation since, at least in this situation, one can derive one’s M directly from either R or G but not from both. In other words, as has been explained, if Smith derives his M from R, then he will relegate you to second place. If he derives his M from G (you as the source), Smith has failed to act on R.

ii- Smith believes he should give priority to R rather than to G. As ethical persons, you both have agreed that in all situations a commitment to R comes first. When Smith visits, he
indicates that he has derived his M from R. You accept this, since if you were in his situation you would do the same. Here, it is notable that Stocker’s critique reflects not only on the problems of a divided psychology, as most commentators readily recognize, but also on the very nature of such goods as friendship. In this instance, Stocker would contend that such an agreement between the parties undermines friendship and its paramount status in human life. It is Stocker’s emphasis on the vital quality of such goods (G) that is critical. Referring to normative theories, he comments: “Those theories misunderstand, and often do not allow for, large and important parts of human life, including such important goods as love and friendship.” In the example of the visit, he would say that “if I do not act for your sake, then no matter whether what I do is for the best, I am not acting out of friendship. And whether or not friendship is for the best, human life without friendship is hardly life.” While these goods are not absolutes, Stocker considers that such values as friendship are so fundamental to personal and societal life that in effect they must be placed on a higher plane (“Emotions” 173). To ignore this would be at the expense of sacrificing vital human qualities. As a result, an absolute commitment to a moral principle which would in any way devalue G is incompatible with a good life.

iii - The point is not that to avoid Stocker’s objection one must get rid of R. When G is involved, and one values goods such as friendship for their own sake, it implies that G is already the source for M. Here, Woodcock understands Stocker as allowing that it is possible to have two sources for M as long as one of them takes the form of a sine qua non condition, that is, “a necessary condition that serves as a governing principle but not as a direct motive to perform a particular action” (“Moral Schizophrenia” 12). In other words, R can still have a role as a governing principle if and only if it does not serve as a
direct source from which M is derived when the situation also involves G. Otherwise, goods like friendship/love will be precluded as discussed in “ii”.

iv- Finally, Stocker allows that S may arise even in situations where R does not exist. As discussed in Chapter 2, there is a difference between acting for the sake of friendship and acting for the sake of the friend. The former concerns the obligations of friendship and can put the friend as secondary. On the other hand, the latter holds the friend as the source of the motive for acting. As Stocker expresses the distinction, “concern for friendship is different from concern for the friend” (“Values and Purposes” 755). Specifically, if Smith visits you just to maintain the friendship, although he does want to visit, he is acting for the sake of friendship but not for your sake. Obviously, the two are correlatives, but the main point is that M must be derived from G in the sense that the friend does not become secondary to a good friendship. These subtle but important distinctions indicate just how “demanding” and complex is Stocker’s diagnosis of the malady of spirit.

Taking these considerations into account, it would appear that embracing self-effacing ethical approaches implies an acknowledgment that goods such as friendship, love, affection, fellow-feeling, and sense of community are not paramount constituents of a good life. It would follow that the burden from welcoming ethical theories that cause disharmony becomes too heavy. On the other hand, a harmonious life, following Stocker’s reasoning, can appear to require too much. For example, considering the subtlety of the distinction in “iv”, does avoiding a division between one’s motives and one’s reasons place an impossible burden upon the agent? May not his distinction between acting out of friendship versus acting for the sake of the friend be overly subtle and involve a false dichotomy? Above all, the question obviously arises
whether such a psychological divide is avoidable at all. Has Stocker identified a problem that is inevitable?

**Can Malady of Spirit Have a Cure?**

A number of authors have taken these issues into account. For example, Crisp and Slote have advanced a nuanced critique of Stocker’s objection. First, they turn the spell against the sorcerer by asserting that in fact there is present within Stocker’s own reasoning a normative dimension that must lead to the very disharmony he criticizes. According to them, it follows that even when one accepts Stocker’s analysis one cannot avoid the malady of spirit that he sees as a result of normative approaches. Thus, a divided moral psychology may be inevitable:

> It should also be pointed out that some of Stocker’s own values may lead to the kind of disharmony he deplores. If it is (morally) better to act from friendship than from a sense of duty, it is presumably also (morally) better to act from friendship than from a sense that it is (morally) better to act from friendship rather than from duty, and the person who acts from such a sense on all relevant occasions shows herself to be no (good) friend and perhaps even incapable of friendship. Thus, if one embodies Stocker’s claim fully in one’s life, one precludes the good of friendship in the ways Stocker describes, and, if one does not, one’s life is disharmonious and schizophrenic. One may start wondering whether Schizophrenia is inevitable and whether it is, in the end, such a very bad thing.

(Crisp and Slote 8)

Here Crisp and Slote load Stocker’s critique of modern ethical theories with a normative force so that his critique in effect serves as a normative principle. If one derives his motives for acting from Stocker’s claim that it is better to a) *act out of friendship rather than from a sense of duty*, one also puts the friend as secondary and thus causes a split. In other words, in this situation Smith would tell you that his motives for visiting you comes from the fact that, morally
speaking, he has as a principle that he should act out of friendship rather than from a sense of duty. This means that Smith is acting from a sense of “a”. Inasmuch as Stocker’s diagnosis of the value of acting out of friendship now acquires normative power, he falls prey to his own indictment that ethical theories undermine friendship and he therefore creates another self-effacing situation.

Nevertheless, Crisp and Slote seem to have missed the point concerning Stocker’s objection to modern ethical theories. As discussed above, Stocker’s diagnosis of a division between one’s motives and one’s reasons is a description rather than a normative action-guiding principle. Stocker is not putting forward a normative postulate, e.g. an “a” as Crisp and Slote assert, to replace those of the modern ethical theories he criticizes. Quite the opposite, what he wants to show is the value of emotions as a source from which one can acquire motives for acting. From this it would follow that emotions, which are essential features of personal life, can be a feature of the ethical life. Rather than having any normative principle (e.g., utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics, or acting from a sense of “a”), Stocker thinks that certain emotions themselves are the source of values that conflict with modern ethical theories unless these theories assume the condition of a *sine qua non*. If one thinks at all in terms of normative principles, perhaps in some loose sense, emotions themselves must be the foundation.

In his own article proposing a cure (“How Emotions Reveal Value”), Stocker emphasizes the importance of emotional engagement. Consider playing a soccer game where the other players are not emotionally engaged but you are. Since in sport emotions generally play a crucial role, the spirit of the game would be absent. Perhaps you would experience the soccer game as boring since it lacks the dynamic and the team bonds, although all rules are still in effect and all players are on the field playing. You would certainly recognize that for a genuine game, at least
a majority of the players need to be emotionally engaged. As Stocker highlights, “What we here want is emotionally engaged activity, rather than alienated, machine-like, dead activity” (“Emotions” 182).34

Similarly, Stocker advocates an ethical theory that takes into account emotions as inherent and important values of human life. Crisp and Slote have misconstrued Stocker’s argument in attributing to him an interpretation that an action would be morally valuable if it were performed from a sense of acting out of friendship rather than from a sense of duty. The truth is that Stocker is quite critical of such reasoning.

Stocker is suggesting that emotions can be the medicine for malady of spirit. For instance, if Smith had an emotional engagement with you in the sense that he would keep you as his primary motive,35 his relationship to you would be infused with his emotions. In Stocker’s view, such an embodiment between one’s reasons and one’s motives would help to cure disharmony:

It must be emphasized that what one wants, as well as constituting value, can also be informed by value. This is most easily seen by looking at the engaged care we want to give and receive, e.g. in friendship and love. Here we want not just emotional engagement; we also want the good of the person cared for to be a focus of the

34 In his own example, Stocker focuses on the emotion of loving play between a child and a parent.

35 Woodcock recognizes that for Stocker “primary” does not mean absolute: “Stocker clearly distances himself from this extreme view and acknowledges that endorsing friendship no matter what the moral cost is a reductio that no one ought to accept. He is wise to do so: if you find yourself committed to the claim that you ought to lie to protect a friend from being justly convicted of murder, then you know something is wrong with your analysis of friendship and obligation” (“Moral Schizophrenia”, 12-13).
engagement. Put another way, to act out friendship is to act for the sake of the friend. (“Emotions” 181)

Here Stocker’s concept of act out friendship has not a normative force as a categorical imperative, or as a maximizing principle, or as a normative virtue. Act out of friendship is simply a term to explain an emotional engagement in which goods like friendship, love, and community are the focus of the engagement at first place. Contrary to Crisp and Slote’s argument, it is relevant to point out that for Stocker the value of emotions does not lie in some other esoteric or self-effacing value or goal. Indeed, esotericism and self-effacement are destructive of these values. To see just how important emotional values are, and how many values are emotional, is to see how little room is left for esoteric and self-effacing ethics. (“Emotions” 190)

Thus, it is implausible to say that Stocker’s understanding of act out of friendship succumbs to his own indictment that modern moral theories are self-effacing.

Moreover, Stocker’s theorizing about emotions and values sheds light on a possible way to avoid malady of spirit. Putting aside any issues that can arise from a study of emotions given their subjective character in a pluralistic world, Stocker’s remedy comes across as necessary but insufficient to slay the “monster” that he spotted. On one hand, it is necessary because his suggestion takes as its starting point values/emotions that are unmistakably constituent of a (good) human life. On the other it is insufficient, because while accepting that “the world is increasingly made such as to make these [self-effacing] theories correct” (“Schizophrenia” 466), Stocker does not truly tackle the issue of pervasiveness. He rightly accuses modern ethical theories of disregarding the person, but fails to address the interrelation between the agent and
the normative force of modern ethical theories in constituting the agent. Otherwise, utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics have simply to formulate R (reasons prescribed for one’s action) as a governing principle, which means that R retains the condition of *sine qua non*, while emotions become the source of the motive to perform a particular action. However, as has been discussed, it is improbable that the normative structure of those theories can accommodate emotions as a ground for values while avoiding a bifurcation.

As was likewise indicated in the previous chapters, a self-effacing approach produces psychologically divided agents: first, they conceive of a moral system as supreme; secondly, as a consequence they shape themselves to conform to what the system prescribes. In this case, one should understand the nature of an absolute commitment to self-effacing ethical theories as effectively producing subjection of the agent to themselves. To remedy this, morality should be given its due as a part of, but not the whole of (ethical) life; this means creating a resistance to normative power. That morality is so often seen only in normative terms may explain why Crisp and Slote misread Stocker, since in the background, even in virtue ethics, there lurks the idea that “we can imagine moral commandments as ‘grounded’ only if they come in the likeness of the Law, that is in the form of principles one can spell out, articulate, list, take a stock of” (Bauman 64). This all-too-pervasive understanding leads them to formulate Stocker’s argument as based on a principle, while in Stocker’s positing of emotions as a cure for the malady of spirit it is hard to imagine a principle in any strict sense. It is the culture of absolute commitment to morality that is the problem that must be tackled, so as to allow the ethical life to breathe.

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36 The Foucauldian notion of the constitution of the agent, which sees disciplinary power as producing the subject through a process of normalization, is alluded to in the present chapter. It will be considered extensively in the next. This represents a break with the Cartesian idea of a self-constituted subject.
Otherwise, Stocker’s theorizing about emotions, which can clearly make a helpful contribution towards dealing with the issues, will be to no avail.

The Pervasiveness of Morality Systems

Bernard Williams makes a sharp distinction between morality and ethics.37 The former is a particular approach to the ethical life (“the local system of ideas”) or particular pattern of ethical outlooks (e.g., modes of being in a society which have been consolidated as standards). The latter, a broader term, he would reserve for “any scheme for regulating the relations between people that works through informal sanctions and internalized dispositions” (Williams, “Moral Luck” 241). In this sense, morality assists and is contained within an ethical life, which means, that it can be an important mechanism to foster life in society by promoting patterns of behaviours that a culture has consolidated. Nevertheless, Williams takes issue with a tendency in moral theory that not only shapes the concept of morality itself but dominates – if it does not seek to replace – the ethical life, resting on the idea that there is a sharp distinction between ancient ethics and modern morality: “There is a fairly widespread attitude that ancient theories of virtue and the good life are concerned not with what we take to be morality, but with something different, an alternative which can be labelled ethics (Annas, “Ancient Ethics” 119). Morality has gone through a metamorphosis to become what Williams called a morality system.

What should be a subsidiary range of ethical outlooks has become an all-too-pervasive system that dominates ethical thought. John Skorupski, for example, distinguishes morality and ethics as follows, “Morality is a distinct sphere within the domain of normative thinking about action and feeling; the whole domain, however, is the subject of ethics.” He further characterizes

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37 Although the difference between morality and ethics has not been considered before now, since Stocker uses the term “modern ethical theories”, from here on such a distinction will be taken into account.
the moral sphere “by its function, by the supremacy of the moral, and by the distinct moral
sentiments” (Skorupski 564). This description of morality captures the ascendancy of morality
over ethics. In Skorupski’s definition, morality is just a bottom layer where the full matter is
ethics; his formulation, however, seems already to give morality precedence over ethics. One is
almost obliged to ask: what is the place for ethics? How do the “distinct sphere” and the “whole
domain” interact? In practice, morality will become a system when it overemphasizes the rule of
(legal) obligation. Obligation, Williams argues, becomes the defining factor of morality and,
when overstated, gives raise to morality systems.

Few would maintain that morality is a bad thing per se. The problem arises from what
morality has become, mainly in modern moral thought, which is a theory of morality systems
that focus on exponents of a particular ethical standpoint and effectively reduce all ethical life to
that system. Consider Williams’s description of morality and the morality system:

The important thing about morality is its spirit, its underlying aims, and the general
picture of ethical life it implies. In order to see them, we shall need to look carefully at a
particular concept, moral obligation. The mere fact that it uses a notion of obligation is
not what makes morality special. There is an everyday notion of obligation, as one
consideration among others, and it is ethically useful. Morality is distinguished by the
special notion of obligation it uses, and by the significance it gives to it. It is this special
notion that I shall call “moral obligation.” Morality is not one determinate set of ethical
thoughts. It embraces a range of ethical outlooks … They are not all equally typical or
instructive examples of the morality system, though they do have in common the idea of
moral obligation. The philosopher who has given the purest, deepest, and most thorough
representation of morality is Kant. But morality is not an invention of philosophers. It is
As Williams indicates, obligation is ethically useful, but morality gives obligation a preeminent status. Clearly, the form that obligation will take characterizes the difference between ethics and a morality system. If there were not what Williams calls moral obligation,\textsuperscript{38} morality may be able to partner usefully with ethics. While Anscombe rejects as naive a notion of obligation historically transposed from a Christian society to a secularist one and thus devoid of its original foundation (15), Williams extends her critique further and analyzes the obsession of morality systems with “duty” and “obligation”. When this becomes the case, everything must be explained or resolved in virtue of obligations.

Williams demonstrates that morality systems have acquired a dominating status so that the personal commitment to them is absolute. In his critique of impartial demand in morality, Williams discusses and criticizes an example given by Charles Fried (Anatomy of Values 227). Williams comments: “surely it would be absurd to insist that if a man could, at no risk or cost to himself, save one of two persons in equal peril, and one of those in peril was, say, his wife, he must treat both equally, perhaps by flipping a coin” (“Persons” 17). While Fried was attempting to make a case for impartiality, he overlooks the possibility that one’s motive, so to speak, to save one’s wife cannot inherently embody the impartiality that morality prescribes. That

\textsuperscript{38} Darwall (73-75) argues that Williams seeks to abolish morality. Nevertheless, it is not clear whether Williams’s references in that respect concern morality as meaning morality systems and moral obligation or whether instead Williams is referring to morality as a range of ethical outlooks, which need not necessarily rely on moral obligation. For Williams, the possibility seems to exist that one can make room for morality, if it can be useful to assist the ethical life, but not for morality systems.
explains Williams’s use of the term “absurd.” Any question of impartiality in this situation could only come from a morality system that required a (quasi-) absolute commitment that took priority over one’s motives.39 “At this stage, certainly, only an obligation can beat an obligation, and in order to do what I wanted to do, I shall need one of those fraudulent items, a duty to myself” (“Peculiar Institution” 182). However, in looking for “one of those fraudulent items,” the agent is led to consider “one thought too many” (“Persons” 18). This would occur when the agent feels obliged to deliberate and compare rationales for justifying the action before acting to save his wife.

Williams shows that morality systems start from the assumption that since they act voluntarily, human beings are morally accountable for their actions. To be part of a morality system and its obligatory pressures thus requires that the human experience such feelings as remorse, guilt, and self-reproach. Otherwise, one “would not belong to the morality system or be a full moral agent in its terms” (“Peculiar Institution” 177). Ultimately Williams would claim that if one reasons about morality systems, one will realize that they are illusory and one’s ethics is what matters. Once one gets rid of the morality system, it seems that, as in Stocker’s arguments, a valid ground for ethics would be emotions. As Crisp and Slote explain, “Williams sketchily depicts what ethics could or should be like once freed from the illusions of the morality system. Shame will have a central role along with a host of other emotions that the morality system downgrades in favour of a select and narrow group of emotions” (7).

39 It should be clear that impartiality in this situation also creates the malady of spirit that Stocker speaks of, but in Williams’s argument, the morality system will impose its primacy and the agent will commit to it. Specifically, Williams is focusing on the morality system rather than on the psychology of the agent, although he does make a case for one’s integrity (feeling, personal project, and personal commitment).
Nevertheless, since Williams affirms that moral obligation is inescapable in a morality system⁴⁰ and that moral systems are everywhere, how can one put it aside? How is it possible to resist the morality system?

For Stocker, the solution is to start from emotions, which by default preclude self-effacing ethical theories, and thereby avoid a malady of spirit. For Williams, in contrast, one has first to abolish the morality systems that have dominated ethical thought. Only then can one rely on some fundamental emotions to do ethics. On the one hand, both Stocker and Williams recognize that a morality system forces the agent to give a special status to morality and obligation and categorically commit to it. Yet neither elaborates on how it is possible to confront a morality system when it has dominated ethical thought and has thus become a factor in constituting the subject. As a result, the cures they offer are helpful and even necessary, but they are not sufficient to solve the problem of malady of spirit and the pervasiveness of the morality system.

**Perfecting the Committed Subject: Moral Saints**

Susan Wolf argues against the absolute commitment inherent in a morality system that involves ideal-type of exemplar (moral saints) that one has to strive to imitate. She contends that such a

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⁴⁰ In his commentary on Williams’s *Ethics and The Limits of Philosophy*, A.W. Moore notes that Williams does not oppose all ideas of obligation. As Moore reads Williams, “He readily admits that, in order to live in society with one another, we need to have certain basic and more or less categorical expectations (such as the expectation that we shall not be lied to, and the expectation that we shall not be killed); and that one way in which an ethical life can help here is by instilling within people dispositions to accept the corresponding requirements (in these two cases, the requirement not to lie, and the requirement not to kill) as obligations” (221). A proper understanding of Williams should take into account his acceptance of obligation in this sense. What Williams takes issue with is the usual sense of obligation inherent in a morality system.
model demands too much from the agent, and thus comes to dominate every sphere of human beings’ personal lives. What is important in Wolf’s argument is her focus on the constitution of the agent in the process of becoming the ideal moral person that modern moral theories demand.

Drawing on Williams’ discussion of obligation out of obligation and one thought too many problems, Wolf puts forward an interpretation of Williams whereby human relations are at odds with moral systems: “One attractive ideal of love would prohibit the lover not only from thinking of about morality all the time, but also from being unconditionally committed to acting according to morality all the time” (“One Thought” 71). Wolf explains that the standard view of Williams’s point in “one thought too many” is that the issue is deliberating when the situation calls for an immediate action. However, according to Wolf, even when such deliberation is not an immediate precedent to action, the fact that one might engage in such moral deliberation after or before the situation (off stage) is for Wolf evidence of an unconditional commitment to morality. This is the element of morality that Wolf seeks to challenge. In that same scenario of “one thought too many,” she stresses nonetheless that subjection to an unconditional commitment to morality is not caused by an unconditional commitment to one’s loved one. She recognizes that categorical desires may be at play: “If one recognizes the legitimacy of categorical desires for anything other than morality, however, which ground one’s interest in living and one’s interest in the world, that would be one unconditional commitment too many” (“One Thought” 92). As a result, such categorical desires would in themselves preclude justification41 in some situations.

41 Williams would note that having categorical desires does not preclude one from engaging in cognitive activities about them (“Persons” 11). The point of both Williams and Wolf is consideration of the part that categorical desires play in the decision of the agent (Wolf, “One Thought” 87-88).
Wolf also addresses the process of perfecting oneself to become a moral person in a morality system defined by the idea of moral obligation. Her concept of moral saints sheds light on how the morality system produces subjects who become alienated from the very good that morality promises to delivery. She defines a moral saint as “a person whose every action is as morally good as possible, a person, that is, who is as morally worthy as can be” (“Moral Saints” 79). In other words, the moral saint is the personification of the morality system in terms of both its high demands and its pervasive character. Wolf would argue, however, that this leads to the obliteration of ethical life. Since the life of a moral saint is full of sacrifices and constraints, the moral saint’s life, she maintains, is not at all a model life because it does not allow room for the broader dimensions of human living (e.g., personal, professional, affective, etc.) As Wolf puts it:

The ideal of a life of moral sainthood disturbs not simply because it is an ideal of a life in which morality unduly dominates. The normal person’s direct and specific desires for objects, activities, and events that conflict with the attainment of moral perfection are not simply sacrificed but removed, suppressed, or subsumed. The way in which morality, unlike other possible goals, is apt to dominate is particularly disturbing, for it seems to require either the lack or the denial of the existence of an identifiable, personal self.

(“Moral Saints” 84)

Clearly, Wolf takes issue here not only with the paramountcy of morality but also with the fact that striving for moral sainthood implies suppression of one’s personal self. In other words, a morality system personified as an ideal of a life based on moral sainthood is only possible if agents repress their own drives and interests in order to naturalize the self of moral sainthood.
A further problem Wolf identifies in morality systems concerns psychological conflicts caused by the impartiality factor in morality. Wolf illustrates such conflicts by explaining the clash between the moral point of view and the point of view of individual perfection. The former is an impartial characteristic of morality that formulates its principles based on taking all persons as equals with equal interests. This point of view cannot embrace the fact that people have different values. Individual perfection concerns one’s assessment of what constitutes a good life for oneself and the kind of good person one wants to become. The issue arises because the moral point of view treats persons so impartially that there is little room for individual life. Still, from the point of view of individual perfection, “the (perfectionist) goodness of an individual’s life does not vary proportionally with the degree to which it exemplifies moral goodness” (Wolf, “Moral Saints” 96). In other words, holding up a moral saint as a moral standard to be followed leads to conflict between the impersonal and the personal. Thus, moral sainthood can lead to passing over such goods as friendship, love, personal projects, and personal desires. Here, to some extent at least, Wolf is in line with Stocker’s and Williams’ critique of modern moral theories.

Some have attacked Wolf’s portrayal of moral sainthood and have argued that a solution is to lower the bar so that the ideal of moral sanctity corresponds to social reality. For instance, Robert M. Adams contends that it is possible to have a moral saint without having an unpleasant life. Adams argues that Wolf mistakenly conceives of “moral sainthood purely in terms of commitment or devotion to moral ends or principles” (393). He criticizes “Wolf’s three criteria for moral sainthood”: i) one whose every action is as morally good as possible; ii) one who is as morally worthy as can be; and iii) one whose life is dominated by a commitment to improving the welfare of others or of society as a whole (393). While for Adams, “ii” comes close to
expressing the idea of moral sainthood, portraying a moral saint as “i” can be a fundamental error. For him, “the idea that only a morally imperfect person would spend half an hour doing something morally indifferent . . . is at odds with our usual judgements and ought not to be assumed at the outset” (393). With regard to “iii”, Adams argues that it is possible for one to have a personal commitment to help others which would not demand undue effort.

Adams’s argument is a version of “lowering the bar” to meet the needs of the moral agent, so that the ideal of moral sainthood becomes achievable. He offers empirical evidence that being a moral saint does not exclude various personality types or human excellence. Nevertheless, even if one accepts this, the problem of the pervasiveness of morality in the constitution of the subject remains, as does the unconditional commitment to morality, which is not simply an issue of setting goals higher or lower. So does the issue Wolf has raised of suppressing the agent’s categorical desires to shape the self in accord with the morality system’s standards. Wolf argues against the very idea of the normative dimension of morality since she does not think it acceptable to act from a moral point of view that violates the idea of individual perfection. She specifically rejects the concept of adjusting the ideals. This cannot be the solution unless normative questions do not rely on “a perspective that is unattached to a commitment to any particular well-ordered system of values” (“Moral Saints” 98). As long as the moral saint has as a characteristic an ideal that is an action-guide, neither Adams’s version nor any other can be reconciled with the agent’s perspective of individual perfection.

Wolf concludes that the morality system should be rejected since it is built on the premise of an undesirable ideal that conflicts with the personal life. Given the pervasiveness of morality, the way in which they act to constitute the agent involves suppression of the ethical life; the morality system and the ethical life become mutually exclusive. As a result, Wolf calls
for both undermining an unconditional commitment to morality and for giving primacy to the personal as a starting point for ethics. Here, Wolf’s grounds – which draw on Williams’s account of categorical desires – have a similarity to Stocker’s emphasis on emotions as a cure for malady of spirit.

As compared with Stocker and Williams, Wolf goes further by introducing the issue of the constitution of the subject, yet she does not suggest a path of resistance to the dominance of the morality system. She correctly acknowledges that morality takes everyone as having the same interests despite the reality that personal lives exhibit different conceptions of what one’s good life is. It would follow that the reasoning by which people act morally should be different. Nonetheless, for all their ill effects in creating a conflict with individual perfection, universalist systems of moral sainthood remain extremely influential. So do similar normative systems. Why is this? Why do morality systems that rely unduly on moral obligation and create for the individual the ugly conflicts of discordant life, remain so prevalent?

Conclusion

This chapter argued against the contention that one should disregard Stocker’s diagnosis of modern moral theories as self-effacing because he fails to show that a non-divided psychology is better than a divided one. I also argued that self-effacing moral approaches preclude goods (friendship, love, community) that are fundamental for a social life. I recognized Stocker’s medicine to cure the malady of spirit by emphasising the value of emotions in the moral process as necessary but insufficient in itself to deal with the problem. It is necessary because Stocker’s starting point is the criterion of values/motives that are derived from emotions, so if there is a governing principle it must be a sine qua non condition. It is insufficient because Stocker fails to

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42 Chapter 5 will deal with this issue in detail.
address both the pervasiveness of modern moral theories and their normative force that is constitutive of the agent. Williams’s indictment that morality relies on the fundamental idea of moral obligation was considered as a complement to Stocker’s critique. Although Williams puts forward an idea of ethics whose source is a group of core emotions, he does not address how the morality system constitutes the subject, nor does he talk about resistance to such a pervasive system. Thus, both Stocker’s and Williams’s solutions, while they provide helpful insights, are not really sufficient to cure the malady of spirit.

Seeking to investigate the effect of morality systems on the agent, this chapter turned to Wolf’s discussion of an unconditional commitment to morality and her recognition of the constitution of the agent that would come from an ideal of a moral saint. Wolf contends that the needs of one’s personal life are at odds with an unconditional commitment to morality. She also examines the conflict between the moral point of view (i.e., a normative value that morality imposes to the agent without truly embracing personal values) and the point of view of individual perfection (i.e., one’s own evaluation of a good life). While Wolf does touch on the idea of perfecting the agent, she does not speak of how resistance to such morality systems is possible. Stocker, Williams and Wolf have all made valuable contributions to the discussion, but their contributions leave unresolved the question of why, if malady of spirit, morality systems, and moral sainthood all undermine the personal life, have they continued such prominent features in the moral landscape? If they preclude goods that people value – and should value – why have not such morality systems been rejected? To open up such questions, the next chapter takes up Foucault’s aesthetic of existence to see the conditions needed to formulate a broader answer to Stocker’s dilemma.
Chapter 5

Practices of the Self as a Resistance to Morality Systems

The previous chapter examined whether there is a cure for Stocker’s indictment that modern ethical theories are inherently self-effacing. As was noted, ignoring Stocker’s challenge because he does not show that a non-divided psychology is any better than a divided one implies undermining such goods as friendship, love, affection, fellow-feeling, and the sense of community. Stocker’s own solution for malady of spirit suggested that deriving one’s motives from emotions can avoid a split between reason and motive. While with his emphasis on emotions Stocker has no doubt made a positive contribution, his solution does not address the larger issue of the pervasiveness of morality systems.

The study then turned to Williams, aiming to understanding the peculiarity of morality as dominating the ethical life, as well as to Wolf, seeking to shed light on the constitution of moral agents. Williams raises the issue of overemphasising the role of moral obligation, although he nuances that problem considerably. Wolf in turn exposes the negative side of an unconditional commitment to morality as well as the constitution of the moral self by the morality system, a process that requires suppressing the ethical life. Both rely on the emotions/desires as a central ingredient of any solution. The difficulty is that neither Williams nor Wolf addresses how the subject recognizes the self as a moral subject and simultaneously as an object of the morality system. An obvious correlative issue is why, if morality systems are repressive and exclude the personal life, are they so influential? Why have not people rid themselves of morality systems that act to the detriment of ethical life? Despite the negative overtones given them in the writings of Stocker, Williams and Wolf, morality systems are often highly regarded as a positive
and productive force. In these authors’ arguments, this paradox remains unresolved. A shift to an emotions-based approach does not seem sufficient to resist the pervasiveness of morality systems. Indeed, since the authors’ main concerns are narrower, they offer only a very limited analysis of that phenomenon. Clearly the attractiveness of modern morality systems cannot be discounted, but what, more precisely, creates their pervasive appeal? Perhaps here an investigation of the interplay between the subject and morality systems can be of some help. Taking up this thread, the current chapter seeks to discover in Foucault’s ethics of the care of the self a way of complementing the solutions proposed by Stocker, Williams, and Wolf.

In what follows, in order to shed light on the relationship between morality systems and the subject, I first discuss what Williams defines as a morality system through Foucault’s lens of disciplinary power. I further consider how Foucault’s genealogical method represents a difference from the usual historical approach in explaining how morality systems acquire a pervasive legalistic characteristic. Then, I briefly explain Foucault’s concept of how moral subjects are constituted by of disciplinary normalizing power, which also clarifies how individuals recognize themselves as ethical subjects. Finally, I make a case for Foucault’s care of the self as a potential solution for Stocker’s malady of spirit, since an ethics of care of the self is centred on practices of freedom that resist normalizing power.

Morality Systems: Historical Considerations

A common point raised by philosophers who are critical of modern moral theories is the normative structure of morality systems as grounded on notions of law and duty. As mentioned earlier, Williams differentiates between ethics and morality and argues that the latter became a morality system due to its overriding focus on moral obligation that led it to dominate ethical
thought. The question therefore arises: how did a morality that relies on duty come to dominate ethics? Elizabeth Anscombe provides a plausible explanation when she comments, “The answer is in history: between Aristotle and us came Christianity, with its law conception of ethics” (5). She contends that Christianity developed a model of ethics that was based on divine natural law where god is the authority, the legislator. From this concept came the moral values that impacted upon modern ethical theories. As Anscombe outlines the process, “In consequence of the dominance of Christianity for many centuries, the concepts of being bound, permitted, or excused became deeply embedded in our language and thought” (5). This influence of the Judaeo-Christian tradition on morality has produced a transition from an ethics whose view was broader and more personal to a legalistic conception whose view was considerably narrower, where the negative side of duty was often guilt and punishment.

This impact, according to Roger Crisp, “has had two results. First, the primary question has been not ‘How should I live?’, but ‘How should I act?’ Secondly, answers to the question about how to act have been put in terms of obligations. Morality is seen as a law-like set of principles which bind us to perform or not to perform certain actions” (Crisp 1). Crisp makes the point here that concern for right action came to be the determinant of ethics. But he also recognizes that the impact of the tradition created not only a shift from an agent-based approach to an action-centred one, but a suffocation of the broader ethical life by the idea of moral obligation. Williams, although he attributes the turning point to Kant’s pure reason, underlines the importance of this distinction between living and acting in terms of the pervasiveness of morality systems. He expresses the distinction in another way: the ethical idea of the ancients centered on “How should I live?” was absorbed by modern moral theories telling me “what life
morally ought I to live?" (Williams, “Peculiar Institution” 5) This shift involves the reduction of life, in which morality is a part but not the whole, to an idea that whole of life is the moral life.

In a legalistic approach to morality, principles are formulated to impose a conception of interests that people ought to have rather than leaving them to work out their own interests and to take account of their own emotions. Systemically, it is a top-down approach that undervalues emotions and encourages rationality. As a result, modern moral theories assume that personal interests accord with a single rational standard and that persons are thus equally obligated to the law. Stocker, for example, infers that the reasons driving modern moral theories to prioritize a rationale that provokes a disharmonious life were “developed in a time of diminishing personal relations” (“Schizophrenia” 465) that the legislator wished to regulate. This is a situation where “The legislator wants various things done or not done; it is not important why they are done or not done; one can count on and know the actions, but not the motives” (Stocker, “Schizophrenia” 465). Unfortunately, this sort of reasoning represses the ethical life. The problem is compounded because the system takes the self as a representation of a universal (atomic) self. Stocker has expressed this well:

[Recent writers on ethics have viewed their field from a legislator's or an external assessor's point of view, and not from the point of view of an agent or patient. They think collectively, in terms of what everyone should do, and what it would be good if everyone did. Unfortunately, their collectives are composed of impenetrable individuals. Or what comes to the same thing, they see and discuss each person not as agent and also patient, not as self and also other, but only as a representative or typical universal person: a person who, instead of having these different moral roles or statuses, combines them all indifferently, losing the essential features of each. (“Agent and Other” 218)
To explain such a legalistic account of morality, Stocker appeals to the historical context where an increase in individualism and a corresponding decrease in personal relations produced a legalistic moral approach whose main objective in terms of togetherness and community was to address disagreements among individuals.

Louden comes to a similar conclusion: “This absence of agreement regarding human purposes and moral ideals seems to drive us (partly out of lack of alternatives) to a more legalistic form of rationality” (215). Schneewind is helpful in elaborating on the process by which this is seen to occur in practice:

It [natural-law] reminds us of the basic needs we share, and the difficulties, inherent in our nature, to overcoming them. It gives us laws showing us what we have to do to solve the problems. And it instructs us to apply those laws either to resolve our disput es in their terms (in a state of nature) or to construct civil laws which will give us more specific instruments for reaching agreements. (200)

Clearly modern societies are complex and they are characterized by pluralistic values. Inevitably, disagreements are a common feature. Reading Louden’s and Schneewind’s accounts, one would seem obliged to conclude that if a society is pluralistic, a rule-based system of morality is necessary, morally speaking, to manage such diversity.

Nevertheless, one would need to turn again to Anscombe. She has called attention to the fact that modern society is secular, and thus has no foundation for a moral structure that was previously grounded on a divine legislator. For this fundamental reason, she calls for the abolition of any such deontic account of morality. In her view it ultimately has no basis:
To have a *law* conception of ethics is to hold that what is needed for conformity with the virtues failure in which is the mark of being bad *qua* man (and not merely, say, *qua* craftsman or logician) – that what is needed for *this*, is required by divine law. Naturally it is not possible to have such a conception unless you believe in *God as a lawgiver* [emphasis added]; like Jews, Stoics, and Christians. (Anscombe 6)

Without a belief in morality grounded on the divine, it is not credible to imagine that a legalistic model of morality will have the necessary quality of obligation to compel people to abide by its normativity.

Anscombe’s main point here is that a concept of morality relying on a divine lawgiver does not correspond to modern Western values. Her argument can be summed up as follows:

i- God is the foundation of morality in the Judaeo-Christian era, so morality requires that people believe in god.\(^43\)

ii- If one does not believe in god, then the Judaeo-Christian morality, which is grounded on the very idea of duty and moral obligation, ceases to have a basis.

iii- Western modern society is characterized by rationality, a separation between religion and the state, and an admiration for science. As a result, there is a practical disbelief in god.

\(^43\) Anscombe includes the Stoics as those who have the divine as the source of morality. According to her, the Stoics “thought that whatever was involved in conformity to human virtues was required by divine law” (5). Nevertheless, unlike Christianity, the Stoic conception of god was pantheistic, where god was corporeal and the cause and effect of the universe. For instance, Dirk Baltzly would assert that the Stoic conception of god, to some extent, “relies on an extension of what is the best science of the day” (23).
iv- Therefore, it follows that in the Western world a morality that is grounded on an effectively discredited god cannot sustain itself.

With these considerations in mind, Anscombe calls for an abolition of modern moral systems that have lost their axiom of a divine command. Moral obligation no longer has any real meaning. It is “a word containing no intelligible thought: a word retaining the suggestion of force, and apt to have a strong psychological effect, but which no longer signifies a real concept at all” (Anscombe 8). This is why Anscombe maintains that modern society needs a philosophy of psychology before it again begins to do ethics properly. While recognizing the value of her commentary, I would suggest that she jumps too quickly to a conclusion in declaring that, to use a Nietzschean phrase, “the death of god” totally undermines the rationale of a law-like morality.

This is a metaethical issue, so it must be recognized that the normative features can be sustained if they find a substitute foundation. In other words, Anscombe’s “ii” is problematic because it does not follow necessarily that a practical disbelief in god implies the collapse of the normative force of duty and moral obligation.44 To put it metaphorically, god may have lost a throne but perhaps the law-like kingdom is still there.45 In this respect, Michael Foucault would

44 This does not mean that Anscombe’s critique of modern moral theories is invalid. Morality is still pervasive by its same focus on moral obligation. However, an interpretation is that scientific truth might have come to replace the divine as the foundation for such morality systems.

45 Nietzsche recorded the death of god as having already occurred: “We have killed him – you and I. All of us are his murderers” (181). For instance, Nietzsche would argue that the death of god means ending negative nihilism, the era from Plato through Christianity that saw the negation of mundane life in favour of a divine/transcendental. The death of god was caused by modern science (the Enlightenment project), which put the human before god, and saw human progress as based on reason discovering absolute (scientific) truth. As Nietzsche notes, modern man is rational, a free agent, autonomous, self-determined, who can discover objective reality with some certainty. For
argue that there is a common element between Christianity and modernity which is pastoral power. This is a form of disciplinary power that relied on both individualization and totalization, gave attention to knowledge of people’s consciousness, and sought to provide individual salvation in the next world. It is important to stress that this form of power focused on both norms and character. According to Foucault, this same kind of pastoral power, while devoid of its divine underpinnings, has found its way into the modern state:

But all this is part of history, you will say; the pastorate has, if not disappeared, at least lost the main part of its efficiency.

This it true but, but I think we should distinguish between two aspects of pastoral power – between the ecclesiastical institutionalization which has ceased or at least lost its validity since the eighteenth century, and its function, which has spread and multiplied outside the ecclesiastical institution. (EAIF 214; emphasis added)

The thesis advanced by Foucault opens up the possibility that one should not take as a given Anscombe’s “ii”. Accepting a plausible alternative may lead to uncovering new elements that might help answer questions that Anscombe, Stocker, Williams, and Wolf could not effectively address. Their explanations have answered only partially at best the significant background question: why do morality systems that rely unduly on moral obligation, undermine goods like friendship, love and community, and create for the individual the ugly conflicts of a discordant life, remain so prevalent?

Nietzsche, the Enlightenment killed god, but introduced reactive nihilism, replacing god by an objective positivist scientific foundation.

Since pastoral power is an extension of disciplinary power, this thesis will not focus specifically on it. For a description of pastoral power, see EAIF 213-215.
Morality Systems as the Panopticon

Foucault’s concept of disciplinary power may not only fill in some of the gaps left by Anscombe, Stocker, Williams, and Wolf in their arguments against morality systems. It may also inform the solutions to the problem they have provided. Indeed, Foucault presents a conception of power that is neither ahistorical nor repressive; for him, power can be a necessary and productive force. Moreover, power is not a force that one can hold alone. Power is irreducible to a binary between power-holders and those subjected to power. Nor is power fixed in the hands of a bourgeoisie that expropriates the proletariat making them powerless, since the working class must go through strategies of subjectivation that would be impossible if they too did not exercise power. Power, for Foucault, is defined in a singular manner, as “a mode of action upon the actions of others” (EEW3 341). Consequently it is not found only in the superior-inferior relationship where others locate it. The form of disciplinary power that was pastoral power actually functions, in modernity, as a power that constitutes rather than always repressing. This is why a morality system is still currently attractive; in a positive way, it can continue to develop strategies of government, a word that Foucault uses in its older, non-institutional, sense. As applied to morality systems, it might be said that the morality system operates by “governing” agents who internalize its rationality as their own so that they in turn can maintain the system.

In his genealogical study of prisons and punishment, Foucault highlights a new form of power that became a mechanism of control in modern society. His genealogy outlines in a nuanced manner the transition from sovereign power to disciplinary power.\footnote{From disciplinary power has come biopower, the employment of techniques and procedures projected to govern human beings in every aspect of their lives. If the Scholastic sovereign was characterized by the power to make die}
ultimately a form of power over life and death exercised by the sovereign, “The sovereign exercised his right of life only by exercising his right to kill, or by refraining from killing” (EHS1 136). On the other hand, disciplinary power is a mode of power that functions positively in the form of techniques to mold individuals and make them docile. As Johanna Oksala puts it, “Disciplinary power does not subject the body to external violence, it is not external or spectacular. It focuses on details, on single movements, on their timing and rapidity. It organizes bodies in space and schedules their every action for maximum effect” (“Foucault Politics” 98-99). Unlike the sovereign power that is distinguished by the use of violence (or the restraint of its use), disciplinary power is characterized by a gentle form of capitalizing the dissymmetry within institutions in such a way that increases conformity to their rules. Gradually, this makes domination effective.

To illustrate the emergence of disciplinary power, Foucault uses as an illustration Jeremy Bentham’s concept of a Panopticon. The Panopticon, a design for a prison, is an architectural

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48 In Foucault’s description, a Panopticon is “at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy . . . They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each
mechanism which allows the guard in its central tower to observe each inmate in the surrounding building. Yet the inmate does not know whether at any moment he or she is under the guard’s observation. The inmate in Foucault’s description is an “actor”, alone, isolated from fellow inmates: “A collective effort is abolished and replaced by a collection of separated individualities” (EDP, 201). Since inmates can neither see each other nor know whether or not the guard is observing them, they have to behave as if they were being observed constantly. By supposing that they are being observed, inmates automatically become an object of the mechanism of observation. By policing their own behaviors in a way that the Panopticon demands, inmates are also subjects who impress such a power relation within themselves.

Foucault explains this double role of object and agent:

> He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. (EDP 202-203)

In this situation, disciplinary power operates to discipline and control bodies. At the same time, by imprinting its effects, it also works to internalize behaviours so that the inmates conform to the system.

Foucault’s genealogy of power is a structural analysis within which Williams’s notion of the morality system can be understood as a mechanism of disciplinary power. While Williams only criticizes the rationales used by modern morality, Foucault seeks to uncover how power actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible. The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unitaries that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately . . . Visibility is a trap. (EDP 200)
operates, in particular how such disciplinary techniques act on the body creating docile subjects
who in turn foster the same system that governs them. As Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow
argue, “Panopticism is a perfect example of a meticulous ritual of power which, by its mode of
operation, establishes a site where a political technology of the body can operate; here rights
and obligations are established and imposed” (EAIF 192; emphasis added). Those rights and
(moral) obligations are internalized through the functioning of disciplinary techniques that make
themselves acceptable by providing rationales to justify their raison d'être. In this way
disciplinary power can present itself as positive and productive.

For the sake of argument, one can re-consider Louden’s recognition of the importance of
a rule-based morality: “This absence of agreement regarding human purposes and moral ideals
seems to drive us (partly out of lack of alternatives) to a more legalistic form of rationality”
(215; emphasis added). However, if such absence of agreement is caused, for example, by
cultural differences, how would be possible to say that “a more legalistic form of rationality” is
the standard? Would it not be the case that the cultural differences were caused by the
rationalities (morally speaking, the disagreement about metaethics that affects its normativity:
divine command, Kantianism, utilitarianism, Aristotelianism) within each culture? Of course
those questions concern one’s concept of reason since, as C.G. Prado puts it, Foucault “accepts
that there is reasoning, but he does not accept that there is reason above and beyond delineatable
historical modes of reason” (“Reason” 424). Still, even if one conceives of reason as ahistorical
and accepts that that moral disagreement and cultural relativism lead to a legalistic-rational
standard, it is still the case that such a standard itself produces the differences. In other words,
the rationality for accepting a rule-based approach presents itself as a necessary condition as
well as sustaining itself by arguing that there is a lack of alternatives when at the same time
there are different accounts of human purpose and moral ideals. This means that disciplinary power manifests its positive face by gently imposing its rationalities while at the same time its pervasiveness dominates the ethical life.

Foucault’s concept of disciplinary power accounts for how morality systems work. Undoubtedly, he would accept Anscombe’s judgement that modern moral theories were influenced by Christianity. Where he would differ would be in contending that the pastoral power exercised in Christianity has not ended but has found its way into modern society. This transition into the realm of the secular would provide a basis for Stocker’s accusation that modern moral theory undermines emotions and thus important goods (friendship, love, community) by imposing its rationality, for Williams’s indictment that morality systems are characterized by overstating the notion of moral obligation so that they dominate ethical thought, and, finally, for Wolf’s charge that modern moral theories are so demanding that they swallow up personal life by producing identities. However, Foucault would disagree with the portrayal of morality systems as solely negative or oppressive. He would pose the following questions: “How did they come about?” and then, “Why do people obey them?” The first question was addressed by Anscombe and by Stocker, but their conventional historical approach could offer only superficial answers. On the other hand, neither of them addresses the second question. Foucault’s genealogy of power can address both.

As was seen earlier, Anscombe’s answer to the first question was, quite simply, Christianity. Stocker, too, explicitly raises the question, commenting that “it might be asked how contemporary ethical theories come to require either a stunted moral life or disharmony” (“Schizophrenia” 465). His answer was that they were developed from the point of view of legislators. Both Anscombe and Stocker appeal to history to find a continuity to explain the
present. Williams, too, might be included in this category. As a result, all three can be accused of committing the genetic fallacy which Colin Koopman describes as “conflating the past historical development of a practice with the present justification of that practice” (92). On the other hand, Foucault’s genealogy does not seek to lay down a normative historical justification. As Koopman indicates, what Foucault “seeks to recover in locating the precise practices and procedures which have contributed to our current forms of constituting ourselves” are nothing less than “the materials for self-transformation” (103). A simple historical approach cannot account for the relationship between agents and morality systems nor can it provide a locus of resistance.

Even if one considers Anscombe’s and Stocker’s answers plausible, a Foucauldian version of the second question would be: “If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it?” (EFR 61; emphasis added). In other words, if morality systems were only repressive and acted contrary to the personal life, why do agents obey them? Anscombe, Stocker, Williams, and Wolf do not explicitly address such a question, and it seems that one cannot find sufficient material for an answer in their arguments. As a result of a negative concept of power, they can offer only a negative/repressive concept of morality systems. Foucault puts forward a different view:

In defining the effects of power as repression, one adopts a purely juridical conception of such power; one identifies power with a law which says no; power is taken above all as carrying the force of a prohibition. Now I believe that this is a wholly negative, narrow, skeletal conception of power, one which has been curiously widespread. (EFR 60-61)
As applied to the realm of morals, morality systems must have a positive/good mechanism to sustain themselves rather than being only negative, repressive, useless, or disharmonious as Anscombe, Stocker, Williams, and Wolf have portrayed them. Foucault understands power and a power relationship quite differently: “What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse” (EFR 61). Thus, a Foucauldian reply to the question of why people subject themselves to morality systems is that the morality system produces agents though a disciplinary power that is sufficiently positive that the agent and the system mutually sustain each other.

Making Moral Subjects

For Foucault, the Panopticon principle is the mechanism by which modern institutions function. Behaviors and actions are determined by the fact that individuals imprint within themselves the disciplinary power. As Ladelle McWhorter describes Foucault’s concept, “Disciplines are collections of techniques for acting on bodies not just to extract some “product” such as labor or gesture of fealty (as sovereign power seeks to do) but to change those bodies, to train them to do something they otherwise would not have done as efficiently or at all” (316). Such techniques (moral, juridical, physical, regulation), while they act directly on the body, also

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49 Foucault also introduces the conception of biopower. While disciplinary power focus on the individual practices, biopower is a form of power that seeks to improve, administer, and control the social body, “a power that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations” (EHS 137). In other words, Foucault notes that before the modern state, the sovereign power manifested itself as the right to make die and let live. However, through disciplinary power, the modern state asserts total control over its constituents by exercising the right to foster life and let die.
effect and control the soul. Thus they impose identities. This is why Foucault claims that “The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body” (EDP 30). Hence, disciplinary techniques that act upon the bodies inscribe identities within them by a process of normalization.

The normalizing disciplinary power is a vital factor in contributing to the fabrication of the subject. Foucault notes that disciplined subjects were fabricated through standards that maintain a justification for the disciplinary power. As Dreyfus and Rabinow express it, “As disciplinary technology undermined and advanced beyond its mask of neutrality, it imposed its own standard of normalization as the only acceptable one. Gradually the law and other standards outside of power were sacrificed to normalization” (EAIF 193). This means, as Foucault explains, having a standard “normal” that maintains a corresponding logic of “abnormal”, thus allowing the disciplinary power to operate by a “normalizing” framework. For example, the term “homosexual” was developed as an “abnormal” identity within the normalizing framework by comparison to the “heterosexual” as the “normal”. The result is that once they assume such identities individuals are constituted by such normalizing terms: “Homosexuals, for example, may embrace their “abnormal” identity but challenge its pathologization by asserting it as a variant [of a] kind of developmental norm” (McWhorter 319). In turn, such fabricated identity may strengthen the logic that sustains the normalizing disciplinary power. Once people come to see the world through such new identities they already have naturalized them and therefore accept the normalizing framework. The focus of the problem should be those categorizations that make up the normalizing framework.

The normalizing disciplinary power is tied to Foucault’s claim that power and knowledge go hand-in-hand. For example, in the “homosexual” example discussed above, there
is the idea that once one knows one’s true essence, he or she can liberate the self. While knowledge of such a core-self implies liberation or self-realization, it needs to be recognized that seeking or accepting such a “truth” about oneself is to legitimize the normalizing framework rather than to refuse it. In seeking to know one’s essence that is waiting to be revealed, the same subject subjects the self to the game of disciplinary power. The point is that to know one’s “true” self is to be controlled and normalized. Foucault observes that “In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production” (EDP 194). In other words, power produces knowledge and the knowledge produced reinforces the power.

It should be clear that Foucault’s subject is seen as constituted by disciplinary power and its normalizing feature. In this sense, Foucault is critical of the idea of a Cartesian autonomous and self-determined self, or any account of self that relies on an essence that has to be actualized: “The individual is no doubt the fictitious atom of an ‘ideological’ representation of society; but he is also a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I have called ‘discipline’” (EDP 194). This means that for Foucault even a sense of self that is attached to a community but holds the idea of an essence or a core that is independent of disciplinary normalizing power seems unrealistic. There is no “true” inner self to be discovered; it is what has been fabricated by discipline. Diana Coole has expressed the irony involved: “Foucault insists that the modern self is produced by a discourse of confession, wherein we are induced to articulate what seem to be deep truths of the inner self. That self, however, is created rather than revealed in this process” (125). This means that the self is constituted, in that it naturalized an identity which results from the relations of power.
If one returns to the arguments of Anscombe, Stocker, Williams, and Wolf, they contain no account of the impact of the morality system in constituting the subject. These philosophers seem to take for granted that moral subjects can self-determinately sidestep the morality system and get back to the ethical life. On one hand, they portray the negative aspect of morality systems and recognize them as dominating the ethical life. On the other hand, they offer no explanation why moral subjects give importance to and justify the very existence of the morality system. The issue is that they do not give attention to how the morality systems produce their moral subjects through their disciplinary power.

Not only the morality system, but morality itself, lies within the realm of power relations; it disciplines and controls its moral subjects. It also functions to normalize them. In explaining Foucault’s position, Dianna Taylor has written, “Under disciplinary power, Foucault writes, there is an originally prescriptive character of the norm.” Taylor explains that the norm determines what is normal. Subjects constitute themselves and are in turn constituted through techniques of power that presuppose the norm, construed as an ideal or “optimal model” (49-50). In other words, the moral subjects are produced by morality systems. The idea of production is a factor that Anscombe, Stocker, Williams, and Wolf miss. Anscombe has suggested that “It would be a great improvement if, instead of ‘morally wrong,’ one always named a genus such as ‘untruthful,’ ‘unchaste,’ ‘unjust’” (8-9). Unfortunately, this would not be a solution. Even if one gets rid of such moral concepts as moral obligation and duty, the normalizing disciplinary power would still be fabricating moral subjects.
Practices of Freedom as Resistance

Foucault contends that contemporary society does not believe in an ethics founded on religion. He would also contend that people do not want the morality systems to intervene in private life (*EFR* 343). Although, as previously discussed, there are major differences between them, his first point resembles Anscombe’s position. Similarly to Anscombe, Foucault also believes that modern morality is incoherent since, in Bob Robinson’s explanation, it “attempts to derive moral obligations from human nature and yet modern thought also holds that human nature can never be, given the fact of human finitude, fully given to human knowledge” (2). In addition, Foucault would agree with Williams that contemporary moral theories do not seek to understand ways of living but are characterized by the imperative of morality over the ethical life. Hence, Foucault seeks to deal with the issue of an ethical life that would resist normative power. However, power is everywhere. One cannot escape from it. How then can one resist power?

Within a Foucauldian perspective it is clear that “to act in defiance is to act within power, not against it. To escape from power one would have to be utterly alone and free of all the enculturation that makes us social” (Prado 73). For Foucault, it is possible to resist only by playing the game of power differently so that one is able to act creatively to resist it. Foucault argues that power is exercised upon subjects because they are free: “When one defines the exercise of power as a mode of action upon the actions of others… Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are ‘free’” (*EEW* 341-42). Indeed, considering that subjects are not free from power, to speak of freedom means the way that they understand power relations and creatively act against its normalizing face. Foucault’s genealogy is a means to pave the way for one’s freedom. This freedom is not to say that one can be emancipated from power.
relations, but that power relations can be otherwise. As Todd May points out, “If we understand our history, understand who we have come to be, and understand that we do not have to be that, then we are faced with the possibility of being something else. That is our freedom” (123). Consequently, those practices of freedom engender resistance to normative ethics with its fixed notion of subject.

It is important to stress that such resistance is not negative; otherwise, one would indeed affirm the normalization framework by negating it. Consider X’s identity as “normal” and Y’s identity as abnormal. Supposing that Y wants to resist X’s identity, so Y seeks to embrace its identity and challenge X’s identity. Here, Foucault would say that such resistance is a form of legitimating normalizing power. His idea of resistance means that one has first to break with such normalizing categorization by creating other possibilities of being that are not normative. This means that one should resist such objective subjectivity by creating oneself rather than naturalizing an imposed identity: “After all, here we are faced with a subject that can create itself, make something of itself, rather than being merely a node in an evolving system of power” (May 122). This is to say that resistance to the morality system implies unmasking power and avoiding an imposed objective subjectivity in order to open up the possibility for an ethics of care of oneself.

For an Ethics of Care of the Self

In Foucauldian ethics, those practices of freedom are actualized through an ethics of care of the self (“le souci de soi”). Foucault conceives of ethics as the form by which one conducts oneself in relation to the prescriptions of a moral code:
Given a code of actions, and with regard to a specific type of actions (which can be defined by their degree of conformity with or divergence from the code), there are different ways to “conduct oneself” morally, different ways for the acting individual to operate, not just as an agent, but as an ethical subject of this action. (EHS2 26)

Indeed, since one has to resist normalizing disciplinary practices imposed by morality systems, the relationship of oneself to oneself, in the face of a given moral code, is crucial for ethics. His concept of ethics is to some extent not different from that of Williams; except that the concept itself implies resistance to prescription since the ethical condition is freedom. Implicit in such ways to “conduct oneself” is the mode of subjectification by which the individual recognizes oneself as an ethical subject in relation to the moral principles, and decides to value such principles. Foucault’s definition of ethics thus focuses clearly on the subjects rather than on obligations or even emotions.

Foucault was interested in the Greek-Roman culture of taking care of oneself. However, he stresses the difference between modern morality and ancient forms: “In antiquity, this work on the self with its attendant austerity is not imposed on the individual by means of civil law or religious obligation, but is a choice about existence made by the individual. People decide for themselves whether or not to care for themselves” (EFR 361). That is not to say that he wants to rescue earlier traditions and apply them to the present. This would run entirely contrary to his genealogical method: “You can’t find the solution of a problem in the solution of another problem raised at another moment by other people” (EFR 343). What he wants to do is to problematize such practices of the self so as to understand contemporary relations of power and the constitution of the self. As a result, to resist disciplinary normalizing power is possible in an ethics of the care for oneself aiming to reinvent oneself constantly.
Foucault’s care of the self is distinct from any selfishness. It is always outward looking, relating also to the care for others since one is talking about practices of freedom that involve power relations. Foucault explicitly recognizes this, noting that care of the self “implies complex relationships with others insofar as this ethos of freedom is also a way of caring for others” (EEW, 287). His ethics is an aesthetic of existence, a constant work on oneself rather than an idea of caring that is reducible to care in the ordinary sense. As Foucault expresses the concept:

What strikes me is the fact that in our society, art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals, or to life. That art is something which is specialized or which is done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life? (EFR, 350)

In other words, rather than working on a notion of a given identity that is a product of disciplinary normalizing power, Foucault inverts the logic by focusing on the subjects, thus allowing them to exercise creative ways of being and of experiencing life. He presents a way of positively resisting the normalizing power in addition to opening up for the subject different forms of being.

Under such Foucauldian ethics, Stocker’s malady of spirit would not be a challenge for the following reasons. First, there would not be a normative aspect creating the split between reasons and motives. Foucault was quite wary about setting out proposals or principles that could become another mechanism of normalization. He states very clearly: “But the idea of a program of proposals is dangerous. As soon as a program is presented, it becomes a law, and there’s a prohibition against inventing” (EEW, 139). Second, a Foucauldian ethics would
welcome Stocker’s emotions as well as Williams’s and Wolf’s drives as long as practices of freedom were not reducible to them. Finally, in Foucault’s view the actions would spring from the situations since practices of freedom are necessary condition for such an ethics. That means in turn there would not be a rationale or principles or codified experiences invading the ethical life as happened in the case of Smith. To conclude, practices of freedom would in a sense overwrite the disciplinary power of the morality system so that morality would not invade private and personal life.

**Conclusion**

This chapter attempted to elaborate a more complete solution to the problems of modern moral theories raised by Anscombe, Stockers, Williams, and Wolf than they provide. In fact, their approaches to the issue of the pervasiveness of morality systems could not shed light on how the moral subject recognizes the self as a moral subject and simultaneously as an object of the morality system. This chapter also sought to understand some obvious questions left unanswered by the basically negative/repressive portrayal of morality systems advanced by Anscombe, Stocker, Williams, and Wolf. If morality systems are repressive and exclude the personal life, why are they still so influential? Why have not people rid themselves of morality systems that act to the detriment of ethical life? Unfortunately, while their critiques are valuable, their accounts do not offer an explanation to such questions.

Taking up this thread, and before proposing an ethics of care of the self as a possible solution, this study turned to Foucault’s concept of disciplinary power aiming to understand how morality systems operate. First, it briefly discussed the historical methods used by Anscombe, Stocker, Schneewind and Louden for explaining how morality came to be defined by its
legalistic characteristics. It then considered Foucault’s genealogical method. This suggested that their efforts to understand the genesis of morality systems in modern society by a simple historical analysis cannot account for how disciplinary power played and plays a role in morality systems. Foucault’s approach helps to answer the question of the attractiveness of morality systems despite their domination of the ethical life. In other words, Foucault’s account of power as something that operates as a positive rather than only in a negative/repressive form explains why morality systems are still attractive. Disciplinary/normalizing power produces the reality and in the process constitutes its subjects, aiming to sustain itself in such a power relation.

Foucault’s practices of freedom offer the possibility of a remedy to resist disciplinary normalizing power. Since Foucault defines power as an action upon the actions of others, power is everywhere and one cannot escape from its realm. Here, freedom is possible by playing the game of power differently, by understanding power relations and avoiding an imposed objective subjectivity. Although one cannot escape from power, by understanding how power relations operate one is free to constitute one’s self differently from the given/imposed identity. These approaches are practices of freedom that form the fundamental conditions for an ethics of care of the self. This means that one has to be concerned for one’s self so as to avoid an imposed identity. The ethics of care of the self is in itself resistance to normative power and is possible if subjects look upon themselves as artistic creations.

Such Foucauldian ethics would offer a cure for Stocker’s malady of spirit since an ethics of care of the self precludes the normative aspects that cause the problem in the first place. This ethical approach would also value emotions while not being reducible to them. Finally, practices of freedom would resist the pervasive character of the morality system.
Chapter 6

Conclusion

This thesis discussed some prominent critiques of modern moral theories. Since Elizabeth Anscombe’s milestone article “Modern Moral Philosophy”, modern moral theories have been exposed to criticism regarding their overstating of duty and moral obligation, as well as their lack of a moral psychology. This study sought to examine the normative structure of these theories (deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics), and Michael Stocker’s conclusion that they create a split between one’s reasons and one’s motives. Stocker’s example of Smith’s visit illustrated how such theories operate and poses a strong challenge to them. Moreover, Bernard Williams’s indictment that morality systems have overly focused on moral obligation and have come to dominate ethical thought was also considered. Finally, the thesis considered Susan Wolf’s arguments that morality works against the ethical life and that an unconditional commitment to moral theories undermines the personal life. All of these authors agree that modern moral theories have a law-like feature and are too demanding. Nevertheless, they were unable to explain why such repressive/negative morality is still relevant.

Looking to address such issues, this study turned to Michel Foucault’s concept of disciplinary power. For Foucault, power produces reality and is not independent of knowledge. Disciplinary power also produces objective subjectivity; by it the moral subject is constituted. Since there is no escape from power, to speak of resistance to it is to play its game differently. This implies that one has to develop ways of constituting oneself without falling prey to a disciplinary power that normalizes. This condition is essential for an ethics for the care of the self, although “[t]he idea of creating oneself as a work of art has fuelled a lot of heated criticism
against Foucault” (Oksala, “Foucault Politics” 166). Foucault’s analogy of taking one’s life as a work of art can be interpreted as seeing the self as a subject without a fixed inside but constantly open to new possibilities. Just as an object of art makes possible various interpretations and provokes different reactions in the contemplators but still retains the appearance of being a thing/an object (a vase, painting, sculpture), so too does a self where subjectivity permits different modes of being while remaining a body. In this manner the ethical life can take form in diverse ways even within a rigid moral framework. If morality truly includes “a range of ethical outlooks” (Williams, “Peculiar Institution” 174), looking upon life as an object of art allows such possibilities because ethical subjects would have different ways to contemplate life and to react to it.

Foucault’s ethics offers a plausible solution for Stocker’s malady of spirit. First, his ethics of care of the self is only possible if the subject rejects the normative aspects of power that produce the malady of spirit. Furthermore, this ethical approach also values emotions while not being reducible to them. Finally, practices of freedom avoid the domination of the ethical life by the morality system. To conclude, an ethics of care of the self implies creative ways of different modes of being as well as a constant process of constituting oneself. Stocker makes his point by turning to Socrates, “We might thus extend Socrates’ dictum that the unexamined life is not worth living by adding that neither is the unfelt life” (Stocker, “Emotions” 182). I hope that such examination would take into account disciplinary normalizing power, since both an unfelt and a felt life are that power’s product. So, too, is life itself unless human beings become machines.
Works Cited


