THREE FORMS OF POLITICAL ETHICS

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THE DOMINANT ethical theories affecting Western political thinking in the twentieth century have been utilitarianism and deontology. Utilitarianism is one type of teleological or consequentialist ethics, postulating that the end (*telos*) of moral action is prior in importance to the content of moral judgment. Deontology is concerned with "ought," with obligation, with rights and duties, with promises and commitments. In the language of ethicists, deontology is preoccupied with the nature of *right,* or the *content* or moral action; utilitarians (and other teleologists), are preoccupied with the nature of the *good,* or the *object* of moral action.[1] Kant is the archetypical deontologist. Bentham is the "classical" utilitarian.

A third, more amorphous, form of ethics is what I will call the ethics of virtue. It is concerned not first of all with the criteria of good actions, measured by consequences, but the criteria of the good actor, measured by standards of character and performance. It regards as prior in importance and concern not the obligations that ought to be felt *by* moral persons, but the quality of moral excellence *in* persons. It seeks to judge excellent character, rather than good objectives or right duties. Readers of the *Nichomachean Ethics* will know how old such theories are. Readers of contemporary philosophical journals will note but a few articles on the subject of virtue in the last two decades.[2] Readers of political science journals will see almost nothing on the subject until Stephen Salkever's article "Virtue, Obligation and Politics" in 1974 and the commentary it engendered by Richard Bank and Stephen McCarl, " 'Virtue, Obligation and Politics' Revisited" in 1976.[3]

In this paper I shall first offer a brief commentary on the relationship of utilitarianism and deontology to contemporary political thinking. In Part II I attempt to sketch the recent progress of virtue ethics. In Part III I address the question of whether and to what extent virtue ethics offers perspectives on political questions that might supplement the perspectives of utilitarianism and deontology in a useful way.

I

"During much of modern moral philosophy," John Rawls has written, "the predominant systematic theory has been some form of utilitarianism."[4] From the outset, from Bentham's felicific calculus onward, utilitarianism has been social in orientation, scientific in tone, and egalitarian. Its special relevance to legislative

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[1] See W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930); D. D. Raphael, *Moral Judgment* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1955), chs. 1–4; W. D. Hudson, *Modern Moral Philosophy* (Garden City: Doubleday-Anchor, 1970). That the traditional teleological-deontological distinction is as fundamental as usually assumed has been challenged by Andrew Oldenquist in his "Rules and Consequences," *Mind* 75 (1966): 180–92.

[2] See N. J. H. Dent, "Virtues and Actions," *Philosophical Quarterly* 25 (October 1975): 318–35; Jon Wheatley, "Virtue: An Analysis and a Speculation," *Analysis* 22 (1962): 70–72; Jack Kelly, "Virtue and Pleasure," *Mind* 82 (July 1973): 401–8; Terry Penner, "The Unity of Virtue," *Philosophical Review* 38 (January 1973): 35–68.

[3] Stephen G. Salkever, "Virtue, Obligation and Politics," *American Political Science Review* 68 (March 1974): 78–92; Richard M. Bank and Steven R. McCarl, " 'Virtue, Obligation and Politics' Revisited," *American Political Science Review* 70 (September 1976): 886–904.

[4] *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. vii.

and political questions has long been noted, for moral judgments relating to practical political issues must deal with the motives and desires of large numbers of people (especially in egalitarian societies) who cannot be known individually, and who are (especially in competitive societies) in conflict over scarce goods. The title of Bentham's *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* symbolized a potential link between moralists and legislators. As a theory of moral value "social hedonism" ("the greatest happiness for the greatest number") is often contrasted with the more individualized "egoistic hedonism," but in their utilitarian forms, an egoistic psychological assumption is hard for either to avoid. The early utilitarians "assumed that men were irredeemably egoistic, impelled by nature to pursue their pleasures. Yet at the same time it assumed that they could stifle this impulse when it collided with the happiness of others; only a proper bargaining process was required."[5]

The concepts of "interest" and "public interest" have been important linguistic tools in this bargaining process, a process in which the liberal tradition generally has placed great faith. Like "value," the concept of "interest" originally had economic connotations, connotations which still cling to it, not only from the related idea of money paid for the use of money, but from the linking together (*inter,* between; and *esse,* to be) of the chains of mutual advantage. The "public interest" is presumably something more exalted and worthy of commendation than merely the common denominator of private interests. At any rate, by the twentieth century it would not be regarded as eccentric for a political scientist simply to put other goods aside and declare: "The public interest is the highest ethical standard applicable to political affairs."[6]

Most actors in politics do not have to be told to follow their own interests rather than some higher good, even though they may wish to know what that higher good might be. The appeal of abstract concepts like "interest" or "utility" is more to academicians, whether they be ethicists[7] or social scientists. The economist Allan Coddington has shown how the concept of utility, for contemporary economists as for the early utilitarians, serves as a link between is and ought. In economics the attempt has been made to use hedonism as a purely analytical tool, to divorce it entirely from psychological egoism and ethical consequentialism, but the latter live on in microeconomics and welfare economics, respectively. In microeconomics it is assumed that economic choices reflect individual "preferences" and these, in turn, reflect individual "interests." At the same time there is a studied avoidance of psychological explanations of those preferences which may, in fact, be a result of habit, conditioning, impulse, foolishness, generosity, or any other causal factor not directed toward one's "interest." Though Paul Samuelson has a theory of "revealed preference," it is a purely behavioristic theory, which Coddington says would better be called "a theory of consistent purchasing patterns," for while it facilitates theorizing about consumption, it says nothing about the real preferences of real people.

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[5] Blair Campbell, "Helvetius and the Roots of the Closed Society," *American Political Science Review* 68 (March 1974): 1153–68 at 1160.

[6] C. W. Cassinelli, "The Public Interest in Political Ethics," in Carl J. Friedrich, ed., *The Public Interest.* Nomos V (New York: Atherton, 1962), p. 46. See also Richard Flathman, *The Public Interest* (New York: Wiley, 1966); Virginia Held, *The Public Interest and Individual Interests* (New York: Basic Books, 1970); Glendon Schubert, *The Public Interest* (New York: Free Press, 1961); Theodore M. Benditt, "The Concept of Interest in Political Theory," *Political Theory* 3 (August 1975): 245–58.

[7] R. M. Hare, in *Freedom and Reason* (New York: Oxford, 1963), makes a sharp distinction between "interests" and "ideals" and describes the fanatic as one who allows ideals to overrun interests, including the interests of others. His critics think the distinction is not sustained; e.g., R. N. Berki, "Interests and Moral Ideals," *Philosophy* 49 (July 1974): 265–80.

Likewise the theory of "cardinal utility" in welfare economics provides scales of individual preference to facilitate quantitative analysis without solving the problem of whether these quantitative properties are summable. Coddington concludes that "modern utility theory has been not so much *purged* of hedonistic associations as allowed to function independently of whether it has hedonistic associations or not.... The great virtue of utility is that it allows us to beg the unanswerable question of what people really want."[8]

The debt of many quantitative political scientists to economic theorists is well known. Riker and Ordeshook, for example, as a postulate connected with two of their mathematical formulae, offer a consumption model distinction between private goods and public goods (we could probably substitute "interests" for "goods" without much change in meaning). As they say, "the total supply of a private good equals the amount consumed by the first consumer plus the amount consumed by the second consumer and so on." By contrast, public goods are said to be characterized by the fact that "everyone consumes equal quantities of the good without diminishing the amount consumed by others."[9] Defense and public safety are given as examples of the latter. Without entering into the debate as to the validity of treating political goods as consumption goods, I wish merely to call attention to what is no doubt a truism, that utilitarian habits of thought, whether ethical or empirical, permeate contemporary thinking about politics.

If utilitarianism is especially appropriate to legislative ways of thought, deontology is especially appropriate to judicial ways of thought. The question of whether an action is legal is not easily allowed to turn on the determination of whether or not its consequences maximize pleasure or satisfaction. It is usually believed that a person is bound by the law quite independently of any specific good consequences produced by his obedience of the law. And a crime is a crime even if no one suffers from it.

Of course legal obligation is not the only significant form of obligation, nor that form to which philosophers necessarily give their most ardent attention. The common distinctions between physical obligation ("I am obliged to use crutches for two more weeks"), legal obligation ("I am obliged to appear in court on Tuesday morning"), political obligation ("I am obliged to oppose such a reckless policy"), and moral obligation ("I am obliged to help that poor fellow out") do not sort themselves into a natural theoretical pattern. "... it is impossible," said Sergio Cotta, "to establish an uncontroversial hierarchy between law and ethics and politics."[10] From Hobbes and Locke to Tussman and Rawls political and legal obligation may be seen as based on consent legitimated by a contract, but while contract theory is central to modern western political thought, the contractualist argument is not the only basis for a theory of obligation.

One of the most significant recent studies of obligation by a political scientist is Richard Flathman's *Political Obligation*. Flathman is not a contractualist, indeed he is a utilitarian, but perhaps it is significant that he nevertheless manages to reduce

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[8] Alan Coddington, "Utilitarianism Today," *Political Theory* 4 (May 1976): 213–26 at 225.

[9] William A. Riker and Peter C. Ordeshook, *An Introduction to Positive Political Theory* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973), pp. 245, 247. See also William Buchanan and Gordon Tullock, *The Calculus of Consent* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967); Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965); Karen Johnson, "A Note on the Inapplicability of Olson's Logic of Collective Action to the State," *Ethics* 85 (January 1975): 170–74.

[10] Sergio Cotti, "Law Between Ethics and Politics: A Phenomenological Approach," in J. R. Pennock and John Chapman, eds., *The Limits of Law*. Nomos XV (New York: Lieber-Atherton, 1974), p. 96. The bibliography of obligation theory is extensive. See, *inter alia*, John Plamenatz, *Consent, Freedom and Political Obligation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938); Joseph Tussman, *Obligation and the Body Politic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), Michael Walzer, *Obligations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970); Ralph Ross, *Obligation: A Social Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1970); Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*.

political obligation to something fairly close to legal obligation. Adopting Bergson's distinction between the obligatory and the ideal spheres of morality, in a "stipulative" way, at least, he puts obedience to laws widely accepted into the obligatory category and puts almost everything else — obeying rules not widely accepted, voting, public service, judicial impartiality, etc. — into the ideal category. The significance of the work is that he employs a methodology of linguistic analysis, but unlike, say, Hanna Pitkin in *Wittgenstein and Justice,* who also uses linguistic analysis to good effect, Flathman, in addition, incorporates the approach of analytic ethics, or as it is now more commonly referred to, meta-ethics. He follows H. L. A. Hart in the assertion that underlying every legal obligation is an obligation to obey laws in general. This brings him very close to a deontological position; but in fact he slips out of that mold in the end by resting his case on the good consequences of the whole society accepting the general rule: obey the law. He is, in the terminology of the meta-ethicists, a good reasons act-utilitarian. Act-utilitarianism judges each overall utility (pleasure or happiness or satisfaction). Rule-utilitarianism tries to cope with the almost insurmountable problems of calculation entailed by the specificity seemingly required by act-utilitarianism. Rule-utilitarians ask not "How will my doing this act in this situation affect the balance?" but "Which rule, if applied to this situation and others like it, would best maximize utility?"

Flathman's opposition to rule-utilitarians is that they concede too much to the deontologists. Contracts, promises and rules are, he thinks, useful and even necessary; but they must be judged so by strict utilitarian tests. Being obliged to do something is not the moral equivalent of something being good to do. "Good reasons" must be given for what one does and these reasons must arise out of the concrete situation rather than merely being implications drawn from formal precepts. "Putting a pollution control device on one's car can be defended independent of the fact that there is a law requiring it."[11] Flathman is defining obligations, especially legal obligations, in particular the general obligation to obey the laws of one's society, but he is doing so ultimately because he feels he can give good reasons for doing so in each specific situation that arises. He demonstrates this most impressively in the detailed concluding exposition of Socrates' argument in the *Crito.* Improbably yet plausibly, Socrates is seen as accepting the hemlock in the stance of a good reasons act-utilitarian.

My reason for dwelling at this length on Flathman are twofold: (1) He illustrates how far contemporary philosophic utilitarians are from the early more narrowly hedonistic utilitarians. The spirit of the early utilitarians lingers on in social scientists who seek to tie empirical data, values, interests and behavior together in causal patterns. Flathman, though an avowed utilitarian, rejects the realm of behavior, the realm of reflexes and necessity. His realm is the realm of action, the realm of human choice under conditions of indeterminacy. Moreover, he rejects any narrow interest-oriented egoism as being outside the domain of ethical speculation. Though one's interests are relevant to any decision, ". . . there is no valid inference from 'Obeying this law is contrary to my interests' to 'I have no obligation to obey this law'. . . ." Or, again: "In Socrates' argument personal interest is certainly not the ground and may be a validating condition only in a derivative sense. One must do what is right, and the personal question of personal interest is not relevant to determining what is right. But it is a fact that doing what is right is personally advantageous, at least in the long run."[12]

(2) Flathman, writing a book on political obligation, scarcely mentions many of the things that would seem central to political duties — participation, leadership,

[11] Richard E. Flathman, *Political Obligation* (New York: Atheneum, 1972); p. 115. Prior references were to Hanna Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972); H. L. A. Hart, *The Concept of Law* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

[12] Ibid., pp. 250, 298.

responsibility — in order to concentrate on legal obligations. And he does not mention virtue at all. Similarly, though the power of deontological modes of thought is well illustrated there, the word "virtue" is nowhere to be found in the impressive collection of essays edited by J. Roland Pennock and John W. Chapman under the title *Political and Legal Obligation.*[13]

II

Though neglected by contemporary writers, the subject of political virtue is, of course, a venerable object of speculation. Even the most positivistic researcher in politics knows that, according to Aristotle, ". . . the true student of politics is thought to have studied virtue above all things." What may be forgotten is that for Aristotle moral virtue differs from intellectual virtue as practical reason differs from speculative reason. In the realm of practical reason, Aristotle was not just doing meta-ethics: ". . . we are inquiring, not to know what virtue is, but in order to be good." The roots of the distinction between intellectual and moral virtue are found in Plato, especially in *Meno, The Republic,* the *Sophist,* and *Philebus.* Moral virtue for Aristotle, was a state of character rather than a passion or a faculty. "Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do virtues arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit."[14] To the specific Greek virtues of wisdom, moderation, courage and justice, the medieval church added three not quite parallel Christian virtues of faith, hope and love.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were a high point of speculation on the nature of virtue, especially in English philosophy. One can find as early as 1608 a charming but not always charitable collection of exemplary portraits in Joseph Hall's *Characters of Vertues and Vices.* The concept of virtue is prominent in the moral sense philosophy of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Cudworth and Adam Smith. David Hume, important, among other reasons, as a forerunner of utilitarianism, nevertheless examined the different virtues in both the *Treatise of Human Nature* and the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals.* Adam Ferguson discussed the eclipse of civic virtue in a commercial society. Richard Price in his *Review of the Principle Questions and Difficulties in Morals* (1758) was one of the first if not the first philosopher to make the distinction between objective and subjective right (C. D. Broad said no better discussion of the subject occurred until Ross's *The Right and the Good* in 1930); but it illustrates our point to note that he discussed these under the heading of "abstract virtue" and "practical virtue."[15]

By the nineteenth century the word "virtue," if not the concept, had declined in use. The reasons are complex, but some, like Leo Strauss, blame democracy:

> The identification of the end of the gentlemen with the end of the non-gentlemen meant that the understanding of virtue as choiceworthy for its own sake gave way to an instrumental understanding of virtue; honesty is nothing but the best policy, the policy most conducive to commodious liv-

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[13] Nomos XII (New York: Atherton, 1970). John Ladd in his article "Legal and Moral Obligation" in this book appears to be reaching toward a theory of virtue in his distinction between the externality of obligation theory and "internalism," pp. 3–35, at 34. Fred Frohock, in his otherwise excellent volume *Normative Political Theory* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1974), does not discuss political or civic virtue.

[14] *Nichomachean Ethics,* W. D. Ross, trans., 1102a 8–9, 1103b 27–8, 1103a 23–5, respectively. *Areté* is usually translated "virtue," but "excellence" is as close. The Roman *virtù,* especially important in Machiavelli's writings, is variously translated "strength," "ability," "power," "manliness" as well as "virtue." In the Greek, moral virtue is *ethike,* which was etymologically related, as Aristotle points out, to *ethos,* habit.

[15] See W. D. Hudson, *Reason and Right: A Critical Examination of Richard Price's Moral Philosophy* (San Francisco: Freeman, Cooper, 1970). See also Sir Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1962. Orig., 1876), Vol. 2, ch. 9.

> ing or comfortable self-preservation. Virtue took on a narrow meaning, with the final result that the word "virtue" fell into desuetude.[16]

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have not been wholly bereft of speculation on virtue, however. John Stuart Mill, in this respect at least a typical utilitarian, put emotions — or at least motives — outside the domain of morality altogether. But others, like James Martineau and Leslie Stephen, made motives the center of their ethical systems. Stephen, indeed, provided what might be called the motto of modern virtue ethicists: "... the moral law has to be expressed in the form 'be this' not in the form 'do this'."[17] Stephen argued that the "internal rules" of virtue — e.g., "Thou shalt not hate" — are both simpler and more comprehensive than the "external rules" of other ethical positions, for example "Thou shalt not kill," which requires elaborate qualifications and interpretations.

A bibliography of twentieth century thought on virtue would need to include the second volume of Nicolai Hartmann's *Ethics* (1926). That his concern was with modern rather than ancient virtue is evident in his relativist critique of "moralizing." "Ethics has no occasion to 'moralize.' Everyone can provide himself with a 'doctrine of virtue.' But the moral values themselves permit of being simply pointed out within the limits of the current valuational vision, without reference to their practical tendencies." Hartmann examined the ancient conceptions of virtue but claimed that it was impossible to link them together in a logical whole. We must learn to live with indeterminacy. "Every overstepping of this boundary — and the older doctrines of virtue have always overstepped it — must degenerate into the ambiguity of 'moralizing'."[18] John Laird's *Enquiry Into Moral Notions* (1935) and subsequent writings, especially "Act Ethics and Agent Ethics" (1946) sought to shift attention from an act-oriented "ethics of right" to an agent-oriented "ethics of virtue." He criticized deontologists who put emotions outside the range of willed action and thus outside the domain of right and wrong. Our emotions, he argued, are not wholly volitional. A good man, for example, is normally expected to exercise some control over his temper. To make an emotionless will the sole spring of moral action, is, thought Laird, indefensible.

In his widely used textbook *Ethics* (1963) William Frankena departed from typical contemporary writing in ethics by calling virtue "an old-fashioned but still useful term." He delineated a valuable distinction between "first-order" and more abstract "second-order" virtues (e.g., between being just and general conscientiousness), and sketched a "morality of traits" as his version of virtue ethics. Citing the Stephen maxim on being and doing, he concluded:

> I propose ... that we regard the morality of principles and the morality of traits of character, of doing and being, not as rival kinds of morality between which we must choose, but as two complementary acts of the same morality. Then, for every principle there will be a morally good trait, often going by the same name, consisting of a disposition or tendency to act according to it; and for every morally good trait there will be a principle defining the kind of action in which it is to express itself. To parody a famous dictum of Kant's: principles without traits are impotent, traits without principles are blind.[19]

The principles and traits that Frankena finds most fundamental and irreduceable are benevolence and justice.

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[16] Leo Strauss, *Liberalism: Ancient and Modern* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), pp. 20–21.

[17] *Science of Ethics* (1882), p. 148, quoted in John Laird, "Act Ethics and Agent Ethics," *Mind* 55 (1946): 113–32, at 116.

[18] Nicolai Hartmann, *Ethics,* Stanton Coit, trans. 3 vols. (London: Allen and Unwin, 1932), Vol. 2, pp. 226–27.

[19] *Ethics* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 49, 53.

In 1970 an entire issue of *The Monist* was devoted to the concept of virtue. In that issue Frankena, and also Stanley B. Cunningham, harked back to H. A. Prichard's influential article, "Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?" (1912), and suggested that the eclipse of virtue as a concept in contemporary philosophy owed much to it. Prichard's article so sharply separated right actions from inner desires or a knowable good that he felt the right could never be derived from the good. "... we can only feel an obligation to *act;* we cannot feel an obligation *to act from a certain desire.*"[20] The attempt to derive the right from the good was, in Prichard's very influential view a "mistake." Good actions could not be derived from good motives alone and valid obligations could not, by the same token, be derived from anything as subjective and internal as virtue. The mistake was widely conceded, and deontologists began to look for more external bases of moral obligation. "... the demise of the notion of virtue was inevitable when it was cut off from direct participation in human actions and relegated exclusively to the private area of emotions and desires."[21] (Oddly, although Prichard did not allow right to be derived from good, i.e., did not allow us to feel obligated to act from a specific desire, he did allow the reverse. He thought we could, for example, intuitively feel an obligation to *become* courageous, even if we were not permitted to feel validly obligated by the mere presence of courageous feelings.)

Prichard dismissed the possibility of a different view of virtue in a footnote. This prompted Frankena in the 1970 article to say:

> ... moral philosophy must do more than hint at an ethics of virtue in a footnote — or in an article or a chapter. It must fully explore the possibility of a satisfactory ethics of virtue as an alternative or supplement to one of obligation and moral goodness, not only to explain what the people we admire in biography and literature live by, but to see what there is in our "new morality" and how we ourselves should or at least may live.[22]

The "new morality" to which Frankena refers is presumably the new communitarianism or ambiguous rebellious individualism that grew up in the nineteen sixties. Students of politics may be allowed to wonder that his illustration of the usefulness of an ethics of virtue was not drawn from a slice of the real world but from people "in biography and literature." The sense that people in books are more real than the check-out clerk in the local supermarket may be a peculiar academic affectation. There is, however, a more serious point here. An ethics of virtue may always be somewhat academic because it rests on good motives, which are, we know, in real life always somewhat opaque. Acting on the *assumed* motives of others, however, may be a political necessity — how else can bargaining, promising, contracting, threatening, cooperating go on? Students of politics may all be like Coddington's economists who need certain concepts mainly so they can beg the question of what people really want. Virtue may not be a very good analytical concept for political ethics because it points to an impenetrable inner self. Frankena may have been well advised to advocate an ethics of virtue to explain literary figures, for literary figures have exposed motivations as real people rarely do.

E. F. Carritt, a rigorous writer on ethics, perhaps on these grounds believed that morality and virtue should be separated altogether. His position is that if I do an act I think right "for that reason simply" it is a moral act (Carritt can be classified as an act-deontologist and an intuitionist). If I do an act because I desire to do it, and the desire has usually led to right acts, it is a virtuous act. If the act

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[20] Prichard, "Does Moral Philosophy Rest Upon a Mistake?" *Mind* 21 (1912): 21–37 at 33. The essay is reprinted in H. A. Prichard, *Moral Obligation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949).

[21] Stanley B. Cunningham, "Does 'Does Moral Philosophy Rest Upon a Mistake?' Make an Even Greater Mistake?" *The Monist* 54 (1970): 86–99 at 87.

[22] Frankena, "Prichard and the Ethics of Virtue," *The Monist* 54 (1970): 1–17 at 17.

is done because I desire to do, not just this particular act, but right acts as such, it is a saintly act. Finally, if the act is done with no desires at all, it is a holy act.[23]

With the arrival on the pages of the *American Political Science Review* of the articles by Salkever and Bank and McCarl, mentioned above, we may perhaps herald the return of virtue as a conceptual concern in politics. (Whether the post-Watergate political campaigns of the late 1970s with their added ingredient of appeals to good moral character represent a parallel shift in popular consciousness remains to be seen.) Neither of these articles, valuable as they are, is directed at furthering a new virtue ethic as defined here. Salkever begins by noting how different are the two questions, "What am I obligated to do?" and "What is the virtuous thing to do?" He portrays the politics of obligation and the politics of virtue as "the two alternative political languages presented to us most clearly by the history of political thought." The forgotten political man, the lover of the city, is contrasted with the central figure of modern political life, economic man, the lover of self. It is the predominance of the latter which requires the theory and practice of obligation and legitimacy. (Philosophic man, the lover of truth, in both ancient and modern times occupies a rarified atmosphere outside either the political or the economic realm.) Salkever's complaint is that in modern thought, "the shift from the virtue paradigm to the legitimacy paradigm appears to have been accompanied by a severe narrowing of the range of questions which inform philosophic inquiry into the political things."[24]

The weakness of Salkever is that he draws a Straussian line between ancients and moderns in much too categorical a fashion and therefore exaggerates the unity of obligation theorists and others who might be called modern. Hannah Arendt, for example, despite her admiration for the Greek polis and her communitarianism, is put by Salkever in the unlikely company of modern liberals because she expounds a concept of freedom. Interest theory is treated as but an aspect of obligation theory. The deep gap that separates deontologists and utilitarians as well as the attempts through rule-utilitarianism to overcome the gap are overlooked by Salkever, presumably because neither are Aristotelian.

Bank and McCarl, in reaction to Salkever's juxtaposition of the obligation paradigm over against the virtue paradigm (economic man over against political man), argue that these divisions are not historical watersheds but simply stages in a cognitive-developmental sequence that can be explained in terms of the personal growth of any individual. Following the theories of cognitive and moral development employed by John Dewey, Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg, they argue against Salkever's fixed view of human nature: "Our position is also based on an understanding of human nature. We have argued that the nature of a thing is how it grows, that man grows (develops cognitively and morally) in the presence of justice, so human nature is to be understood in connection with justice."[25]

Virtue for Salkever is Greek *areté,* employed with Greek *phronesis,* judged by Greek *sophia.* Virtue for Bank and McCarl is Kohlberg's sixth stage of moral development. It is no disparagement of their positions to say that together their concerns are more meta-ethical, even epistemological, than ethical. Neither position is directly concerned to incorporate current ethical thinking into a virtue ethic that can be brought to bear on current policy decisions.

III

The task of working out the full dimensions of such a virtue ethic, of relating it to different types of political questions, or even defending its claim to equal standing with utilitarianism and deontology, is more than can be attempted here.

[23] *The Theory of Morals* (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), pp. 136–37.
[24] Salkever, "Virtue, Obligation and Politics," p. 92. Prior quotation at p. 78.
[25] Bank and McCarl, " 'Virtue, Obligation and Politics' Revisited," p. 903.

But perhaps I can set forth some hints, offer an illustration or two, and sketch both a defense and a critique. I shall do so under three headings: A. Is virtue ethics reduceable to utilitarianism or deontology? B. Can virtue ethics raise practical questions (about politics) not raised by the other forms? C. What special difficulties or opportunities arise from the attempt to relate virtue ethics to politics?

A. Virtue ethics is not reduceable to utilitarianism or deontology. Confronted with a problem, we can ask: "Does action X produce good results? Does it maximize satisfaction?" Those are the utilitarian questions. Or we can say, "Ought I do action X? Is it right? Am I *bound* to do it?" These are the deontological questions. Being bound suggests the need to overcome a disinclination. "I don't want to, but I have to." The venerable example of the distinction between the two forms is the case of the son who makes a promise to his dying father which if carried out, it later appears, may produce bad consequences. Does the promise to the father carry any independent moral weight or can it simply be forgotten? If it cannot, no promises or commitments can be wholly reduced to their utilitarian value. The virtue question is: "Is action X compatible with my being a virtuous person?" Unlike the person morally bound the virtuous person tends to act from inclination rather than against disinclination. Virtuous actions are praiseworthy if performed, not necessarily blameworthy if not.[26] Strictly speaking, utilitarian actions are neither praiseworthy nor blameworthy. They simply work or do not work. The good results are cheered, but the agent who produced them, if without either a sense of obligation or virtue, is not part of the moral equation. Kant, for whom a good will is the only thing in the world good without qualification, regarded virtues as "qualities of temperament" which "are without doubt good and desirable in many respects; but they can also be extremely bad and hurtful when the will is not good which has to make use of these gifts of nature. . . ."[27] Moderation and self-control, for example, he thought simply make a scoundrel more dangerous. Yet a just and benevolent "quality of temperament" can just as easily be seen as the wellspring from which good acts and even a good will come forth.

One hopes, of course, that even though not reduceable to each other, utilities, obligations, and virtues are compatible with each other. Even Kant had to concede to the utilitarians that "ought implies can," and even Bentham had to concede that a contract had some binding social effects. Contemporary rule-utilitarians concede to deontologists that rules are important, and contemporary act-deontologists concede to virtue ethicists that character counts. By focusing on persons rather than actions (agent-ethics rather than act-ethics, to use Laird's distinction)[28] virtue ethicists seek to give a moral worth to the *durability* of certain dispositions, an element that attention to the good will of a specific act may neglect. Lawrence Becker argues that a man should be called virtuous only when he does the right thing for the right motives, *and* has an enduring disposition to do such things, *and* has established this disposition through the testing of adversity.[29]

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[26] See J. O. Urmson, "Saints and Heroes" in A. I. Melden, ed., *Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1958), pp. 198–216; Roderick M. Chisholm, "Supererogation and Offense: A Conceptual Scheme for Ethics," *Ratio* 5 (1963): 1–14; Jack Kelly, "Virtue and Pleasure."

[27] *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, H. J. Paton trans. (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), chap. 1, p. 61. G. E. Moore goes even further. He not only denies that virtue can be a measure of intrinsic moral value, but denies that any characteristic can be: ". . . so far as I can see, there is no characteristic whatever which always distinguishes every whole which has greater intrinsic value from every whole which has less, *except* the fundamental one that it would always be the duty of every agent to prefer the better to the worse." *Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965. Orig., 1912), chap. 7, p. 106.

[28] In his *An Inquiry Into Moral Notions* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1935), and "Act Ethics and Agent Ethics."

[29] Becker, *On Justifying Moral Judgments* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 184–87.

It is possible to conceive of virtue ethics as an attempt to reconcile utility and obligation; but the attempt is probably doomed to failure. John Dewey, remarkably persistent in his attempt to bridge dichotomies, can be said to have used virtue in this way. He called Benthamite utilitarianism "content" ethics and Kantian deontology "attitude" ethics, and noted that in ordinary speech both will typically be viewed with suspicion. The negative connotation of "the end justifies the means" is a popular warning to consequentialists. And "the road to Hell is paved with good intentions" is a phrase that reflects the limits of deontological ethics. The error, said Dewey, is in trying to separate motives and consequences. Morality requires both. An unintended consequence is not part of a voluntary act, and a motive, disposition or habit that does not "pass over into an overt act," which ". . . does not do anything, which makes nothing different, is not a genuine motive at all."[30] A virtue or vice is a disposition or habit that *does* pass over into action. The trouble is that Dewey, though he elucidates specific virtues (they in fact come remarkably close to Plato's), is ambiguous as to their moral ground. He calls virtue a disposition used in "supporting or extending the fabric of social values" or in "intelligent identification . . . with some aspect of the reasonable or common happiness." But despite this identification with the fabric of society, he concedes a difference between "conventional" and "genuine" virtue, the latter being connected with "a wider and deeper good" that is left undefined.[31] If this good happens to be the utilitarian's good, we are back where we started.

Though somewhat crudely put, we may say that the norm of utilitarianism is external, the norm of deontology is an internalized externality (i.e., internally generated impulses, wants and affections do not count), and the norm of virtue-ethics is an externalized internality. Duty is "accepted," virtue is "displayed." Duty is "acted upon"; virtue is "acted out." The dutiful man "goes along"; the virtuous man "performs."[32]

B. Can virtue ethics raise practical questions — especially practical questions about politics — not raised by the other ethical forms? Lawrence Becker argues that one consequence of "The Neglect of Virtue," the title of an article by him,[33] is the neglect in ethics of self-perceptions. Some people, says Becker, feel they are failures however many successes they have, while other people stubbornly feel they are successful despite an unbroken string of bad deeds. This is a fact of existence that ethical theory ought to take account of but has not. An ethics of accurate self-perceptions may not be far removed from an ethics of virtue. Without much effort we can push this issue into the arena of politics. For example, it is said that the U.S.S.R. indoctrinates soldiers in a need to kill at a distance since that act appears unnatural, whereas killing in do-or-die, hand-to-hand situations seems natural and needs no psychological preparation. By contrast, the United States military feels a need to indoctrinate troops in personal combat where there is a reluctance to kill, but feels no comparable need for training in impersonal slaughter, which Americans seem able to do more easily. Each side probably sees itself as more humane. Is self-deception a protection against brutality or a higher form of brutality? Neither utilitarianism nor deontology can well cope with this question.

Becker himself cautiously paddles into legal and political waters. He notes, for example, the case of negligence and the "reasonable man" test in tort law. That injurious consequences follow from an act is not proof of negligence. Neither does a general deontological principle (e.g., one has a duty to act with prudent caution)

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[30] John Dewey and James Tufts, *Ethics* (New York: Holt, 1908), p. 237.

[31] Ibid., Quotations from pp. 400, 403, 402, respectively.

[32] A similar internal-external distinction is used by Maurice Mandelbaum in his *The Phenomenology of Moral Experience* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1955), pp. 56–59, but in this case in connection with duty as opposed to interest.

[33] Becker, "The Neglect of Virtue," *Ethics* 85 (January 1976): pp. 110–22.

give us an answer as to whether negligence has occurred. A jury is not asked to state what everyone's duty might be. The question is what a "reasonable man" would do in this particular case. That is a question somewhat closer to an ethics of virtue than to utilitarianism or deontology. Civil disobedience is a topic that has provided much grist for the mills of the deontologists and political theorists. But the character and sensitivity of the person disobeying the law (Martin Luther King, say, as against Abbie Hoffman) may be a relevant factor that must be deemed irrelevant in formal theories of obligation. Becker's article, which so far stands in rather lonely isolation, opens up a wide range of such issues.

The problem of categorical obligations is illustrated by universalistic-pacifistic standards for conscientious objection to war. Though recent American policy required conscientious objectors to swear that their consciences forbad them from fighting in any war imaginable, an individual's reasoned conscientious objection to a particular war should have more rather than less moral weight than uncritical rejection of all possible wars. As Peter Singer puts it, "critical conscience" should be valued over "traditional conscience."[34] But the notion of legal obligation has difficulty accommodating highly particular reasons. From a legal standpoint it may be expedient that all conscientious objectors and civil disobedients (they are not the same) are considered bound by the same obligations. The virtuous man or woman, however, is presumably capable of going beyond obligation. Such a person responds with ungrudging grace to the needs and hostilities of others, and therefore more because of what he or she *is* than by what he or she *does,* can sometimes turn an attention-getting protest into a transforming political event.

Certain issues in current public debate that are presently seen in deontological terms might benefit by a change of perspective. Debates over abortion, for example, that pit the rights of fetuses against the rights of mothers might be improved by stressing *either* the maximization of satisfaction or the character of virtuous parenthood. The gun control debate features impassioned assertions of the right to bear arms (a thoroughly deontological perspective) against assertions of the need to reduce homicides (a thoroughly utilitarian perspective). Should someone ask if a virtuous man wants to own a gun? School bussing is seen largely as a conflict between the right to equality of educational opportunity and the right of parents to determine the schooling of their children. Asking what "qualities of temperament" are being sought might introduce a refreshing note. Capital punishment has generated many heated arguments over the right to life versus the right of society to protect itself. Constitutional issues naturally enough lend themselves to deontological discussion (capital punishment is a favorite example for ethics textbooks). Foreign policy issues tend to feature utilitarian arguments no doubt because a sense of international obligation is not culturally based. A concept of international virtue would seem almost wholly visionary. But many ecological issues are such that their resolution is impossible without changes in the ways of life of vast numbers of people, ways that are so numerous and varied (conserving water, food, energy, paper, etc.) as to be beyond the reach of law. Discussion of the meaning of individual virtue and civic virtue may be pertinent to such issues.

C. What special difficulties or opportunities arise from the attempt to relate virtue ethics to politics? People are afraid of virtue because the term has come to have connotations of self-righteousness. When applied to politics it is viewed with skepticism since it is hard to make virtue accountable. The man or woman of self-proclaimed virtue seems to say "trust me," without providing the constraints necessary to create an atmosphere of trustworthiness. But proclamations of virtue and an ethics of virtue are not the same. Nevertheless, if virtue is performatory, an externalized internality, it cannot provide the same kind of guidance that obligatory

[34] *Democracy and Disobedience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 92–104.

rules or units of pleasure and pain can provide. It does, however, provide guidance of a different sort — the guidance of example.

If legislators need to be amateur utilitarians, and judges need to be amateur deontologists, then executives need to be amateur virtue ethicists. Or at least executives who want to be leaders are themselves led willy-nilly to be exemplars of civic virtue. Good legislators and judges need not be educators (though they can be), but a good executive almost of necessity must be. This is significant for the question of virtue since as we learned from Socrates in *Meno* virtue cannot be taught, at least directly. A more modern statement of the difficulty of instruction in virtue comes from Martin Buber. Speaking to a group of teachers in Tel-Aviv in 1939 he said that while he could teach algebra in a straightforward, no-nonsense way and find a willing response in his pupils,

> . . . if I am concerned with the education of character, everything becomes problematic. I try to explain to my pupils that envy is despicable, and at once feel the secret resistance of those who are poorer than their comrades. I try to explain that it is wicked to bully the weak, and at once I see a suppressed smile on the lips of the strong. I try to explain that lying destroys life, and something frightful happens: the worst habitual liar in the class produces a brilliant essay on the destructive power of lying. I have made the fatal mistake of *giving instruction* in ethics, and what I said is accepted as current coin of knowledge; nothing is transformed into character building substance.[35]

Leo Strauss argues that because the principle of democracy is the freedom of every citizen to do as he likes, democracy cannot also embrace virtue as a principle. Virtue in his view requires liberal education and liberal education requires leisure which, in its original sense of *schole,* no mass society can provide.[36] If Bank and McCarl are right, the prospect of growing into virtue is available to many, provided we make the right educational moves. Their position is more attractive than Strauss's because it is more generous and more hopeful. In either case the concept of virtue is beset with profound uncertainty. Moral uncertainty surrounds even more the concept of virtue ethics, but we shall always need virtue more than we need virtue ethics. I would at least hypothecate the need for both, and if the need for civic virtue is accepted, the next step is political education, which means moral education, which means the transformation of "private citizens" (a contradiction in terms) into "public citizens." Such education, if Buber is correct, cannot be direct but must be in response to the presence of moral exemplars. Virtue ethics will not establish a curriculum but it may raise the kinds of questions people other than moral exemplars will want to avoid. If people are afraid of the doctrinaire implications of political-moral education, they should be reassured that political-moral education saved from pretention by a rigorous virtue ethics is no more a synonym for repression than is moral uncertainty a synonym for anarchy.

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[35] Quoted in *Manas* 28 (November 5, 1975): 5.
[36] *Liberalism,* pp. 10–12.