Response to "Moral Education and Non-Utilitarian Ideals" by John Wilson

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In the hands of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, ethics focused on the question of how to live, or how to live well. The Utilitarians and Kantians, the modern moral philosophers, have hijacked the subject, and have given it a new set of preoccupations. For one thing, they have entrenched a very narrow conception of ethical experience ... they have tended to take a very abstract view of what matters morally about and to human beings. The satisfaction of rational preferences, the more the better, matters crucially in utilitarianism and is the basis of moral obligations; the joint and mutual promotion of autonomy matters crucially to Kantians. Obligations based on these values can conflict very sharply with the requirements of living well. (Sorell, 2000, p. 32)

Introduction

Professor Wilson's paper falls into two parts. He addresses first how certain personal and social ideals and practices, though they cannot be categorized as moral *within* the remit of Kantian or Utilitarian theories, seem to enjoy the *force* of moral imperatives. The term *force* could be what corresponds to the logic inherent in moral justification *or* psychological demands on the individual made by social expectations as well as by one's own conscience. Wilson explores "how we are to make sense of this world" – of non-utilitarian sentiments and practices and how their moral and rational status may be gauged. He then suggests four points relevant to the role non-utilitarian ideals and practices should or should not have in moral education. What follows here are first my thoughts "to make sense of that world," exploring along a trail more

or less parallel to Wilson's "styles of thought," and second how we differ on emphases on aspects of moral education.

Non-Utilitarian Ideals

Alastair MacIntyre (1981, 1988, 1990) has argued that the contemporary language of morality is a hodgepodge of words: inherited fragments of various notions of morality that do not make sense detached from their original contexts. The ethical or moral standpoints Wilson refers to are: Homeric ideals, the greatest happiness of the greatest number (J.S. Mill: Utilitarianism), and "the fact that a principle can be willed by all men, everywhere" (Kant). Philosophers have mentioned other ultimate starting points such as: the fulfilment of human capacities (Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, and F.H. Bradley), conceptions of Ultimate Reality (e.g., Kant, God's Holy Will), and Great Religions. Though the norms and practices deduced from these latter have a great deal in common (Arnold Toynbee, C.S. Lewis), there are significant differences in the *meanings* attributed. For Kantians and Utilitarians, the moral status of classical ideals of *sentiment* (Baier & Luntley, 1995) such as honour and esteem as well as that of injunctions on sexual behaviour, dietary taboos, and ceremonials, is problematic. The various theories mentioned above indicate how the normative force of *practices,* not accommodated within Utilitarianism and Kantianism, can be perceived in different ways. For example, in ancient Israel no distinction was drawn between moral and ceremonial law. Often, greater emphasis placed in fulfilling the latter invited protests from the prophets (Amos: 5, 21-24). "Righteousness" as a term for character meant the respect a man enjoyed in the sight of his fellows and in the sight of Yahweh who personified the supreme instance of justice (Bultmann, 1956, p. 55).

Wilson recognizes that in the main Western values are a reflection of the Ten Commandments. Christianity brought the values of the Decalogue into the Graeco-Roman world. They did not make an immediate impact upon western life. Among the very early Christians, historians notice "embarrassingly few examples" of a clear difference, for example, on the treatment of slaves or the relations between sexes, that was distinctly Christian (P. Brown, 1985). However, gradually the new world-view created a distinct civilization.

Neither the ancient and medieval Hebrews nor the classical Greeks and Romans had a term for what we mean by *moral.* The Greek *Ethos, mores* in Latin, meant disposition, character, or custom. The terms have been translated into *ethics* and *morals* in English. Both the Greek and

Latin terms covered norms of behaviour and attitudes in realms of culture, wider than what is considered the moral domain in Kantian or Utilitarian theories. For the Greeks, the ethical code provided guidance for living *well*.

Before the time of the great philosophers, the Greeks did not ask what *true life* was. Life was not described as *good or bad* in a moral sense. A *flourishing* or good life was the result not only of having virtues or excellence like courage, but also of luck or *FORTUNA*. Achilles, *fortunate* in being the son of a king and a goddess, blessed with good looks, and courageous in battle, won honour and esteem, while cowardice would have brought shame. Heroes like Achilles strove with gods, who were believed to be powerful and immortal, but not perceived as models of *moral* probity. If Achilles's actions did not measure up to what we consider *moral* (they did not!), the Greeks would not call him *bad*, but attributed such behaviour to error (*hamartia*). The heroes of Greek tragedies are victims of fate while in the Shakespearian: "character is destiny." With the concept of individual conscience weak or absent in classical culture, social referents like honour and avoiding shame provided the Greek aristocrat motivation to strive for excellence, *arete'* (Fisher, 1977). Of course, the Greeks had a *moral* code – the usual code that condemns dishonesty, greed, adultery, and sanctioned law codes – as a part of the "nature of things," in a sense, antedating the Olympians, even superior to them. H.I. Marrou said, "When the Greeks spoke about 'the training of the child' – *ton paidon agoge* – what they meant was essentially moral training" (1956, p. 301).

As in every community, participation in symbolic rituals or ceremonies reinforced individual internalization of socially-oriented ideals. Even the agnostic sophist, Protagoras, attended the official religious functions of the Athenian polis as such participation advanced a sense of civic cohesion. For Rufinus, a second century (C.E.) sophist, to die out of obstinacy, denying the gods in public, was a denial of civic values, a theatrical self-indulgence on the part of the Christian converts. His ideal of true virtue consisted of "love of honour" and " love of home city" (Fox, 1986, p. 466). Such virtues were manifest in later western history as *noblesse oblige,* civil religion, republican virtue, or patriotism.

Hesiod, a seventh century (B.C.E.) Boeotian peasant-farmer, in his *Works and Days* and Plato in the fourth century (*Republic, Gorgias, Laws: Bk. 11)* questioned the dominance of Homeric aristocratic ideals and advocated the case for Justice. For Plato, most desirable were virtues of truthfulness, piety, justice, and rationality – to be ingredients

of, not impediments to, living the *good* life. Still among the Greeks, a good life was the one most choiceworthy *(haireton)*, associated (as mentioned) with excellence of intelligence, health, good looks, noble birth, happiness, and fulfilment – *eudaemonia* for Aristotle. It has been suggested that Aristotle is ambivalent on the relation between ethics and moral goodness. To quote: "There can be no doubt that Aristotle did confuse the notion of the goodness for man and the notion of the good of man" (Hutchinson, 1986, p. 67).

The notion of an ethical character at the cost of one's life being circumscribed and diminished was probably not an ideal for Aristotle. In this he was more representative of prevailing Greek values than Plato was. Neither Plato nor Aristotle held that justice was based on the assumption of "human equality" in the Judeo-Christian or Jeffersonian sense.

Ethical and Moral in the Christian Context

How did the inherited classical social ideals come to persist in Western Christendom where moral justification was to be based on the belief in a morally-perfect Judeo-Christian God? To Wilson's allusion that the basic values of the West reflect the Ten Commandments, ought to be added that the first three Commandments set the metaphysical framework for the injunctions that follow. For Christians, personal relations were to be ideally based on love and the related ideas of faith and hope. Love did not mean *liking*, it meant the commitment to practise kindness and compassion in thought, word, and deed toward all – a radical concern for the well-being of others. This differed in emphasis from "the pagan virtues of courage, prudence, moderation [nothing to excess], and fairness" (Unger, 1984, pp. 24-25). For example, in a Christian Elder's opinion the motives of the sophist Rufinus, mentioned above, were "vain glory" (Fox, 1986, p. 467). The new animating spirit is ideally exemplified in the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount and loving one's enemies and turning the other cheek (Luke 6: 27-30). The Christian groups retained and passed on these ideals which have continued to recur in their history, giving it familiar patterns (Fox, 1986, p. 22). Christian attitudes and rewards were published to the point where Christians could not simply forget them. Christianity taught the ideal of charity and the spiritual worth of the poor, teachings which did lead to new practice, though never to the degree the ideals demanded – can it ever? (Valadier, 1992). They did change the ways in which people regarded life's great encounters, between man and woman and also

between people and their gods, which Fox states are "the central themes of [my] book" (pp. 22-23).

Neither *love of honour (philotime)* or avoidance of *shame (aidos, aiskos)* is of intrinsic moral import in the Christian scheme (may even be incompatible). Yet they maintained their appeal among the educated converts (first in Alexandria) to Christianity in the second century. Though classical maxims like *Hubris-Nemesis* and *meden egan* (nothing to excess) tended to inhibit some of the deadly sins, *to hold one's head above others* was still a noble call! Why not harness them as means for a moral end – for motivating the pursuit of Christian virtues? (Fox, 1986, p. 544). Courage and tenacity (classical virtues) were potent weapons to wield against one's evil tendencies and passions. Like the Stoics, indifferent to wealth or glory, what was there for Christians to fight for? Moral victory brought honour. Replacing the military heroes (Achilles, Hector, or Aeneas) were the saints (Paul or Augustine) who winning the moral battles of life had won glory in the sight of God; they were models for imitation (P. Brown, 1995).

> Lists of vices and virtues are found scattered through all the earliest literature of the Christians, and for the most part they differ little from those we could glean from any of the moralizing philosophers and rhetoricians of the same era. Much of the language of Christian morality is language shared with the culture around them. (Meeks, 1993, p. 15).

The classical virtues – justice, temperance, fortitude, and courage – became cardinal in Christian terminology. They were the tracks where the Christians were challenged to run their race and finish their course. Augustine's influence linked ancient pagan virtues to Christian ethics. To quote Peter Brown:

> Through the works of St. Augustine, its more sober, less vibrantly triumphant and supernatural tones would come to exercise a profound influence on the manner in which Western Christians would look back on the triumph of the Church in the Roman world. (1995, p. 8)

Heroic values not only retained their presence but were reinforced by the ideals of the medieval Teutons. Recent converts to Christianity, their desire for military glory was channeled by the Church, through the code of chivalry (cf: *Bushido*), to fighting for Christ. While the Crusades were unChristian in means and aim, the code did emphasize virtues such as respect for the weak and for women, to violate which was a sin as well as to lose honour and be marked with shame.

Scholasticism, a theological and philosophical movement, begun in the 11th century, sought to integrate the secular understanding of the ancient world, as exemplified by Aristotle, with the dogma implicit in the revelations of Christianity. That did not foreclose the Renaissance: John Milton, classicist and Puritan, expresses the allurement of heroic ideals, as well as their incompatibility with the spirit of Christian virtues, when he refers to "Fame ... that last infirmity of noble mind" (*Lycidas*). For the Renaissance educators, par excellence, the Jesuits, *emulation* was the central pedagogic means of stretching intellectually and morally their pupils whose efforts were recognized with tokens, prizes, and privileges.

Non-Utilitarian Injunctions and Prohibitions

Certain prescriptions and proscriptions have a compound *moral-religious-aesthetic* significance; some are merely custom. Those aspects are not always differentiated in cultural consciousness. Some prohibitions can be reduced to the *moral* category, for example, cannibalism and incest; the law against incest might have been intended to pre-empt co-erced sexual promiscuity within the family. Despite the matrimonial examples of Zeus and Hera, or of the Egyptian Pharaohs, it was almost universally taboo by the fifth century before Christ: Herodotus and Plutarch condemn two Kings of Persia, as did their subjects, one for marrying his sister, and the other his daughter. *Aesthetic* sensibility may lead to moral sensitivity. Burgundy's depiction of France in physical desolation, Wilson quotes, or Dickens' of Victorian London in moral depravity, could urge one to moral reflection and action. Orthodox Jews observe Kosher a *religious* obligation; many Jews adhere to it as a *cultural* norm. Similar attitudes prevail among Hindus toward eating beef.

By tradition, in many cultures feminine immodesty has been considered a provocation to immorality. By wearing the head- scarf, the Muslim girls in France are expressing the *religious-moral* virtue of modesty. In western Europe where *tunicula minima* is a common sight except in the precincts of the Vatican, abbreviated expressions of modesty are more than tolerated. It may happen that the head-scarf will have a vigorous resurgence if Paris Haute Couture prescribes it as a "must" in some future season! Then Muslim ladies would still continue to wear it for religious-moral reasons, and some of them may for *aesthetic* – a la mode! Practices related to moral or other virtues evolve, or lose their particular association (Pinker, 2002). In the Catholic churches up to a generation ago, women were expected to keep their

heads covered. Still it is assumed that men would remove their hats in certain religious and public places and functions. In eastern cultures generally, before entering churches, temples, mosques as well as mausoleums, footwear is removed. Whether the obligation felt can be psychologically differentiated is an intriguing question (Morris, 1987).

Wilson mentions the Hindu's ceremonial of washing of hands – a symbol of spiritual cleanliness. The Christian Maundy Thursday ritual of washing of feet symbolizes the virtue of humble service. Fasting was an important element in the Israelite religion, and Christ's own defence of his disciples' failure to fast during his lifetime specifically envisaged that they would fast after his death. From early centuries to quite recently, Christians fasted on Fridays during Lent, and some observed supererogatory fasting for the whole of Lent. "At the heart of Catholicism for a millennium and a half lay a dialectical dividing of time, a rhythmic movement between the poles of fast and feast, Lent and Easter, renunciation and affirmation." (*Tablet*, Jan. 30, 2004, "Fasting – our lost rite"). Detached from their cultural or religious association they make no sense nor are likely to pass a Utilitarian test. Christopher Bryant (1984) thinks that symbols woven into the fabric of public worship and private devotion have reverberated deep within the being of Christians, renewing and vivifying them. He says that they have lost their power for an increasing number of people because: (a) they have failed to retain the element of unfathomable mystery, and (b) to make explicit a symbol completely would be to destroy it as a symbol and turn it into a sign, making it just a shorthand expression of something that could equally well be best stated in words.

As Iris Murdoch – not a religious believer – explains:

Rituals and ceremonials have a sacramental purpose. A sacrament provides an external visible place for an internal invisible act of the spirit. The apprehension of beauty, in art or nature, often in fact seems like a temporarily located spiritual experience which is a source of good energy. (1970, p. 69)

Murdoch reiterates:

Rituals are images, often simple (washing, eating) often complex, doing (the Stations of the Cross). The attentions of the devotees is part of the rite. Here the inner needs the outer because being incarnate, we need places, times, expressive gestures which relate psychic energy and bring healing, making spaces and occasions for spiritual activity or events. Plato connects imagery with the work of Eros, magnetism which draws us out of the cave. (1992, pp. 306-307)

Common practices, whatever their origin, are indispensable for maintaining a sense of community. How some practices and taboos began and prevailed were possibly related to particular environmental and climatic conditions, material resources, means of survival, manners of relating to others, and beliefs about what lay beyond their experience. In the west one would be repelled if dog meat was served while in China some might prefer it to pork. A practice may retain a spiritual or social value even after its biological and psychological roots have been uncovered. After losing any symbolic significance, a practice may survive as mark of a social group. As William James pointed out: To describe the physical basis of an experience is not to negate that experience. Even after the Romans moved to urban surroundings, many rituals connected with agriculture continued to be practiced, for example, the State sacrifice of a red dog to Robigo (blight)! Less ominous: the ancient Christian community in Kerala, India, still maintains "the gold and honey" ceremony: the lips of a child, a day or two old, are gently rubbed with powdered gold and honey by a selected relative. The custom has survived possibly nearly 2000 years, as among the particular caste of Hindus the first Christians were converted from. The ceremony has no religious significance now. It is an *observance* – just followed. Wilson's example of a Victorian Oxford College tea party with its decorum is apt. Sharing a common code of etiquette aids to maintain an impersonal formality: *respecting* individual or family privacy while also preserving a sense of community. Some European nations have been adept in striking the right balance (Sennett, 2003). Etiquette counts, as Oscar Wilde well knew. "The world was my oyster," he lamented, "but I used the wrong fork." Non-conformity is frowned upon especially when singularity in behaviour does not indicate any original value. W.B. Yeats's (1919) *"Prayer for My [his] Daughter"* is:

> And may her bridegroom bring her to a house
> Where all's accustomed, ceremonious;
> For arrogance and hatred are the wares
> Peddled in our thoroughfares.
> How but in custom and ceremony
> Are innocense and beauty born?
> Ceremony's a name for the rich horn,
> And custom for the spreading laurel tree.

Wilson alludes to involuntary contamination, losing honour or purity – incurred unwittingly by an individual, his or her family or community (cf. Morris, 1987: " non-moral guilt"). Mark Antony fell on his sword and Cleopatra sought her dissolution clasping an asp to her bosom rather than face the shame of being taken captive; a samurai commits *seppuku* or *hara-kiri* (euphemism: *happy-despatch)* to preserve his honour. When Saddam Hussein was captured recently and shown in " humbled mien" on the media, even Iraqis who he had been opposed to his regime and happy at its end felt that, passive and humiliated, he had brought shame on the whole Arab nation. An Arab journalist wrote: "A New Indignity for the Arabs:"

> It would have been far better if he had fought to the end and died a martyr as his sons did. Or he could have followed Hitler's example and shot himself in the head. Anything would have been more honourable than ignominious surrender. (*The Ottawa Citizen*, 16 Dec., 2003, p. A5)

A person "involuntarily polluted" may be ostracized by the community. In the West, even after the 1960s when an increased tolerance (or permissiveness) appear to have prevailed, the stigma attached to being "illegitimately" born, does not seem to have vanished. Edmund, in *King Lear,* is not the only "bastard" in western literature invested with natal villainy. Christ (John 8: 1-11) did not condemn the woman "taken in adultery." However, "Judge not that ye be not judged" has been "more honour'd in the breach than the observance." Is there an explanation for social as well as institutional antipathy toward, for example, the illegitimate? Was the traditional censure intended to act as a sanction against extra-marital intimacy by women (though not by a male)? The question abides: "Is social acceptance or tolerance of all but *legal* violation sufficient for sustaining desired social or cultural norms: for example, against despoilation of the environment, self-centred hedonism, prejudice, and hatred? Is a sense of crime, devoid of a sense of Sin adequate? (Karl Menninger, 1973; cf: Mary Midgley, 1989: *"The Flight From Blame)*? Of course, in a politically correct context not to be indulgent toward expressions even of a misguided sense of creativity may risk facing *embarrassment* similar to *aidos or aiskos* liable on the plains of windy Troy three thousand years ago! It has been said: an "impoverished understanding of compassion is the inevitable product of the cloying spirit of sentimentality which exercise so much influence in our society." To be tolerant of the morally indifferent should demand no great effort from, in Matthew Arnold's (1822-1888) words:

Light half-believers of our casual creeds,
Who never deeply felt or clearly will'd.
(The Scholar-Gypsy)

David Callahan (2003), in his recent book, deplores: 'We have a nastier, more cut-throat set of values than the previous generations did. As the race for money and status has intensified, it has become more acceptable for individuals to cheat (cited in the Review: *Boston Globe,1 / 18 / 2004).*

Relevance of Non-Utilitatian Ideals to Moral Education

Moral theory is no substitute for a historically evolved set of practices and customs as a guide to action.(Sorrell, 2000, p. 16)

Wilson is concerned that we may pass on prevailing ideals and practices uncritically to the young at a pre-rational stage, that by the time they become mature enough for rational deliberation they might be *already indoctrinated* or conditioned in them. Wilson says: "It is not that our intuitions of honour and purity are peculiarly mutable and unreliable as guides to action, it is rather that they should not be seen as action-guiding at all." He is not suggesting that the behaviours so *motivated* may not pass the test of rational justification. His point is that their moral status is questionable because psychological *causes* not moral *reasons* prompt the actions. He states that the *guides* to actions "should come within the scope of reason and reflection, though not of utilitarian calculation." Aristotle should agree with Wilson that it is hard, if not impossible, to remove by rational argument the traits that have long been incorporated in the character (*Nichomachean Ethics, NE,* 1179b,15ff). However, Aristotle believed that "argument and teaching, we may suspect, are not powerful with all men, the soul of the student must have been cultivated by means of habits for noble joy and hatred, like earth which is to nourish the seed" (*NE,* 10.9). The *Nichomachean Ethics* are lectures intended for an audience already trained in good character. "Anyone who is to listen intelligently to what is fine and just ... must have been brought up in good habits" (*NE,* 1095b, 3-6).

Plato thought that moral initiation could begin as early as age three. He was not against poetry but against children being exposed to passages in Homer depicting ignoble images in emotional language.

Following Plato, Kieran Egan (1988) says that children must hear the right stories properly read, and see the right pictures, and be shielded from the wrong ones. It is no good saying that they will be able "to choose for themselves" after both good and bad have indiscriminately taken root in their minds. In a paper in the same volume, Ted Hughes warns that powerful images can grow and work with a kind of life of their own, and can *obsess* the individual's consciousness against her or his will. The corruption of children's imagination by purveyors of entertainment, in an age when images are so easily defined is one of the most serious moral issues faced by contemporary men and women. Obviously, the danger posed has alarmed so many parents that the United States Congress passed legislation in 2004 against broadcasting such images.

Appeal to the pupils' rational capacity, Wilson concedes, has to depend on their age and maturity. Nancy Sherman believes that the early process can be:

> A dynamic and interactive one, with natural philia, the privileged context for reciprocal love (antiphilesis) and mutual care (eunoia). The interactive process will engage cognitive capacities, and depend upon a child's active contributions, at the earliest stages. Explanation and reasoning will be introduced appropriate to the cognitive level of the learner. In this sense early habituation is neither mindless nor passive. (1997, p. 80).

In Aristotle's delineation of character development, *dispositions* mature and become integrated parts of more comprehensive *Hexeis* (Malikail, 2003). The concept of *Hexis* seems to accord with the psychology of decision- making discussed today.

As the cognitive psychologist Steven Pinker says:

> The theory of human nature coming out of the cognitive revolution has more in common with the Judeo-Christian theory of human nature ... than with behaviourism, social constructivism and other versions of the Blank Slate. Behaviour is not just emitted or elicited, nor does it come directly out of culture and society. It comes out of an internal struggle among mental modules with different agendas and goals. (2002, p. 40)

Social norms and practices passed on to the young bear generally the mark of a kind of social -cultural reasonableness that have stood the test time. Moral life is not mainly an encounter with moral dilemmas which has to be solved by individual reasoning. The right moral choice is likely to be clear to the agent most of the time. As Les Brown puts it:

We would like everything in our moral lives, including all the moral judgements or conclusions we reach, to be governed by reason. But we find that they are not, and they cannot be. Therefore we have to take account of this simple fact in our understanding of morality: we have to begin by asking what is the case, without then leaping to an unwarranted inference that what is, indicates what ought to be. (1985, p. 321)

But to know is not to *do*. To do what is right is often difficult. Kant emphasizes training the *Will*, from an early age, to defend oneself against making the easier choice; Aristotle's *habituation* is but the means to the training of that *Will*. Motives and intentions are important but complex concepts. General intentionalities can provide basic direction for making moral choices but cannot always be a guide in particular situations. The moral decisions of individuals may vary in the components; reason can be only one element. We do not become moral agents except in the relationships, the transactions, the habits, and reinforcements, the special use of language and gesture that constitute life in community.

As Bernard Williams reminds us: "Our moral intuitions are those unreflective convictions about what is right or wrong, fair or unfair, noble or despicable, with which all the more complicated moral decisions must begin and must take into account" (1985, pp. 94-98).

An intelligent person may need, on occasion, to seek advice from one who is trustworthy and competent to help, as usually done in other areas of life.

On the logical conditions of a moral *action*, Wilson cites Aristotle (*NE*: II.iii) as indicated in the following discussion. For Kantians, a moral action must be objective, impartial, and disinterested in its intention. What this means, as Israel Scheffler remarks, 'is notoriously difficult to characterize' (1960, p. 104). The term, objective, can be taken to mean that the action must be rationally justifiable in the sense of being in accord with a norm independent of the agent's own predilections. An action for its own sake would not imply that to be moral an action could not be a means to an end. For Aristotle, an ethical character was a means to living well. As Wilson says in the first paragraph, the virtues of justice and benevolence are a *means* to "a number of palpable and fairly obvious goods." A Utilitarian, we may presume, cannot demand that a moral action be its own end, and Aristotle would agree even though they may disagree on ends. To say

that virtue is its own reward is not to say that it is *purposeless* as Murdoch does (1970).

Would an *action* prompted by self-serving and ignoble motives qualify as moral if its consequences are good? In the Jewish tradition, it is held that if the consequences for others are good, it is desirable that it be done regardless of the agent's motives. For example, donating to charity qualifies as moral even if the agent's motive is just to see his name published. In Christian spirituality, the moral actor is reminded to keep *purifying* one' s intention. In evaluating an *action* the objective consequences of the action should take precedence over the agent's subjective state. To reverse the order is to ignore the reality of moral life; young children may be encouraged to do morally worthy actions, even if they do so to please parents and teachers. That need not totally exclude other components.

Wilson's citing Aristotle in support of his emphasis on reason as essential to *moral* initiation may be questioned, though he should be in accord with Aristotle's central insight into the genealogy of morals. Neither Aristotle or Kant held that basic moral premises (e.g., justice, benevolence) are arrived at by reasoning. Kant's Categorical Imperatives are transcendent – "things written as the beginning of all philosophy, in obscured but ineffaceable characters within our inmost being." Aristotle however held that actions must be *consistent with rationality (ergon argument)*. Reasoning is a process and if the basic premises are different, the moral conclusions will be different too. To quote MacIntyre :

> We, whoever we are, can only begin enquiry from the vantage point afforded by our relationship to some specific social and intellectual past through which we have affiliated ourselves to some particular tradition of inquiry, extending of that inquiry into the present: as Aristotelian, as Augustinian, as Thomist, as Humean, as post-Enlightenment liberal or as something else. (1990, pp. 401-402).

Therefore, in our pluralist context, it is difficult for public schools to have a programme of Moral Education derived from a unitary *Weltanschauung*. In a curriculum centred on interpretation of justice and benevolence that fit into the dominant *Zeitgeist* (e.g., Utilitarianism, Kantianism) of liberal cosmopolitanism, the assumption is that all particular traditions must be transparent and translatable to liberal terms. Cambridge historian Eamon Duffy recently pointed out that while the draft text of a Constitution for Europe refers to "the cultural, religious, and humanist inheritance of Europe," the preamble talked about the influence of Greece and Rome, and then the Enlightenment,

"airbrushing out all the vast Christian heritage in between." Duffy's remark seems to confirm MacIntyre's point that such "translation" may lead to shallow narrowness rather than universality.

Endorsing a view of development that derives from Aristotle, MacIntyre believes that we acquire virtue as social beings engaged in the pursuit of a communitarian discipline. Though the 20th century democracies militarily and politically triumphed over totalitarian regimes, western democratic societies today have a visceral fear of letting go the guard against any *possible* authoritarian tendencies. So terms like "communitarian discipline" evokes a negative reaction in our post-war culture. The resistance comes from hyper-individualistic idealism, the insistence that each of us is so unique and self-determining as to be utterly independent of any social influence. Even when it is argued that reason is the central element in moral justification, it cannot mean an *individual's own norm in reasoning* can be the action-guide, considering also that the well-being (however defined) of others is presupposed in the very notion of a moral stance (L.Brown, 1985, p. 64). To quote MacIntyre:

> Anomie, as Durkheim characterised it, was a form of deprivation, of a loss of membership in those social institutions and modes in which norms, including the norms of tradition-constituted rationality are embodied. What Durkheim did not foresee was a time when the same condition of anomie would be assigned the status of an achievement by and a reward for a self, which had by separating itself from the social relationships of traditions, succeeded, so it believed, in emancipating itself. (1990, p. 368)

While Wilson questions if non-rational ideals should be action-guiding, he does recognize that *what* should be action-guiding is far too complex to be limited to reason and that reason alone may be insufficient *to motivate* moral actions. Both Wilson himself (1972: on *Krat)* and R.S. Peters have made valuable contribution on this point. To quote Peters:

> It might be well asked whether any kind of priority is to be given to one or more elements in moral life. Are a man's motives in performing a role morally more crucial than the efficiency with which he performs it? Are his ideals deriving from his concept of the good, more or less important than his adherence to impersonal rules? Can duty be reconciled with self-interest? Are higher order traits, such as determination and integrity, to be admired irrespective of the purposes a man pursues or the rule he follows? The devil, according to all accounts, is damnably present. (1970, p. 134, note 7)

Wilson discriminates between an action *guided* by social practice and one made on the basis of an individual's own reasoning. The right to individual autonomy in moral thinking is not, however, synonymous with the right of *individual conscience*. Wilson notes, the instance of a pacifist – who believes his choice is morally right and refuses military service. Though not rarely ignored in practice, for example, medieval Inquisition, the 'right of individual conscience' is implicit in Christian moral tradition. Cardinal Newman, for example, though he accepted the supreme authority of the Pope in theological matters, is reported to have stated that he would drink first to individual Conscience and then to the Pope. The Second Vatican Council explicitly declared the Right of Individual Conscience. Its significance in Western political and moral though is attested to by an authority on Islam:

> It turns out to be quite an exciting question as to just what the central characteristics of Western rationality and rationalisation were from the 12th and 13th centuries on. We very often tend to assume that many elements came to the West through Islam, which in point of fact could be shown not to be derived from Islam or from anybody else for that matter. I have been fascinated by two particular sorts of questions. In the West, it appears that the notion of conscience has a paramount significance, as a kind of pivot around which two very critical structures have evolved. All structures of rationales relative to act and opinion were absolutely determined by the logics that developed out of the notion of conscience...the notion of conscience so far as I know is not a notion that has received very critical elaboration in Islam. (Hourani, 1980, p. 157)

To return to the case of the pacifist – the right of conscience does mean the moral priority of obeying an *informed* conscience. To be *informed* must imply engagement with reason and knowledge in some form. If the moral agent is not aware that this condition is not satisfied, he is morally obliged to follow his conscience. An action so done in good faith (*bona fide*) does not by itself make the action morally right objectively. The term *false conscience* is used to refer to the state that prompts a person to do a morally wrong action. That state of mind in its extreme form is *fanaticism*. Even so, such an agent cannot be said to be morally guilty unless he has *deliberately* neglected to inform himself. Even if he is following his conscience and not morally *guilty*, the legitimate political authority may morally demand of the pacifist that he take up arms. Then the conscientious objector has the *duty to disobey* no matter the legal consequences. In democratic societies, in practice, the conscientious

objector may be spared compliance, if the political authority judges that forced compliance will be counter-productive or that its aims can be met otherwise. The same reasoning can be applied in reverse to Wilson's hypothetical case: one who would refuse to aid his suffering friend to end his life. Not the illegality but his conscience would not allow him: " I just can't do it." Martin Luther's unflinching *Hier stehe ich! Ich kann nicht anders (Here I stand! I can do no other)* – at the Diet of Worms – has resounded down the avenue of history inspiring many a-wavering with the courage of conviction. Sophocles's Antigone, Isabella in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure,* Thomas More in Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons* exemplify those who followed their conscience and suffered the consequences. Arguments for defending the right of conscience cannot of course apply to conditions of membership in voluntary organizations, for example, a club for vegetarians would impose restrictions on what may be served at the weekly dinner!

Why is so much emphasis placed on *reasoning* by some moral educators? A clue may be what Thomas Arnold the Younger, reviewing in 1859 J.S. Mill's *On Liberty,* stated: when we are unsure of the truth of received ideas, what follows is not "constant meditation upon them" as if we could dwell and rest in them, but more critically, a constant discussion of their grounds. This has been characteristic of discourse on Ethics, since the Enlightenment.

William Kilpatrick stresses aspects of moral education different from Wilson's:

> In my conversations with teachers and would-be teachers, one of the most common themes I hear is their conviction that they simply don' t have the right to tell students anything about right and wrong. Many have a similar attitude towards literature with a moral; they would feel uneasy about letting a story do the telling for them. The most pejorative word in their vocabulary is "preach." But the loss of stories doesn't strike them as a serious loss. They seem to be convinced that whatever is of value in the old stories will be found out anyway ... others subscribe to some version of critical thinking and believe it will be found out through reason. (1992, p. 131)

Kilpatrick cites Derek Bok – a former President of Harvard – who does not think that intellectual maturity and moral knowledge would assure moral character. Bok says:

> Socrates sometimes talked as if knowledge alone would suffice to ensure virtuous behaviour. He did not stress the value of early habituation, positive example and obedience to rules in giving

students the desire and self-discipline to live up to their beliefs and
to respect the basic norms essential to civilized communities. (cited
in Kilpatrick, 1992, p. 131)

Bok believes that even at the university level "a broader effort to teach
by habit, example and exhortation" was called for (p. 131). In an
interview related to his book, Kilpatrick said that the *reasoning* model
of moral education is preferred in most schools, not because it is better
but for teachers it is easier.

Encouraging character is hard work, whereas having the children sit
around in a circle and talk about their feelings and exchange opinions is
a lot easier. The other reason is that decision making- approach lets
teachers off the hook of providing good examples, of being good models
themselves.

That view seems to be supported by a comprehensive study on Home
Schooling done recently in Canada. It indicates a main reason why those
parents choose home- schooling for their children is to have direct
influence on the moral environment of the child (*Ottawa Citizen,* 12
March, 2004, p. A4).

To make virtue depend upon unreal contexts in which it does not
arise seems very like a backhand view of vanishing virtue from the real
world. At the same time, it would be Machiavellian to say:

> That ... it is one thing to contemplate the good and another to judge its
> relevance in daily living. The gulf between how one should live and how
> one does live is so wide that a man who neglects what is actually done
> for what should be done learns the way to self-destruction rather than
> self-preservation. (Comte-Sponville, 2002, pp. 3-4)

In the real world everyone who drives a car is not an automobile
engineer, but it is rightly expected that he or she can, by following the
traffic rules, navigate safely the highways as well as the byways. As
Comte-Sponville puts it "Good is not something to contemplate, it is
something to be done. And so with virtue too. it is the effort to act well
and in that very effort itself virtue defines the good" (2002, pp. 3-4).
"What needs to be instilled into the children is a deep respect for life,
their own and others" (Ch.1).

To conclude: on the question, Wilson poses, "What relevance Non-
utilitarian ideals and practices should have in moral education,"
Elizabeth Anscombe's suggestion regarding obligation and duty – "that
the specific *moral* sense of 'ought' ought to be jettisoned" – is pertinent.
The Non-Utilitarian Ideals Wilson refers to are significant in their
contexts for maintaining differing forms of life; they can be directed

towards ends that are moral and consistent with justice and benevolence and even ends that go beyond them. In discussing the subject, Professor Wilson's paper has provided an excellent point of departure.

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