

# Duty Ethics and Virtue Ethics: Between What One "Ought To Do" And "Living Well"

Clovis Demarchi<sup>1</sup>, Douglas Cristian Fontana<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Vale do Itajaí - UNIVALI. Itajaí, SC, Brazil.

<sup>2</sup> Judge at the Court of Justice of the State of Santa Catarina, Brazil.

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## Abstract:

The paper addresses the topic of ethics, in the field of duty and virtue. It involves the understanding of the moral behaviors of individuals, about what they should do and how they should live within the framework of a "good life". The overall goal is to present some thoughts on duty ethics and virtue ethics, their differences, and how different authors have grounded the origin of our moral behaviors. The paper questions whether modern conceptions are innovations to the thought of ancient authors and whether there is, in fact, any marked difference the ethical conceptions of modernity compared to those of antiquity. A central thought of the study argues that many of the modern authors' ideas had already been described by the ancient authors. However, a striking difference that separates the conception of ethics between antiquity and modernity was found, according to the authors studied, which is the high degree of subjectivism of ethics as advocated by modern authors.

**Key Word:** Ethics; Morality; Duties; Virtues.

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## I. Introduction

Modern society, in its complex organization and in the face of the tragic events that have shaped it until today (wars, political ruptures and religious conflicts), especially in the post-war world context, has established a high focus and relevance for the field of rights, especially those of a fundamental nature.

In turn, the study of duties has taken a less prominent place, sometimes almost forgotten in the collective and legal imagination. There is still a difficulty in understanding the notion of complementarity between rights and duties, which ends up generating some rancor in the sense that duties would be antagonistic to rights.

As if this were not enough as a reason to study duties, it is worth remembering that the notion of duty goes far beyond the merely legal, entering strongly into the ethical field, notably in the conceptions of ethics of duty and ethics of virtue, encompassing moral concepts on what to do and how to live well, our relations with ourselves and with others, highly relevant themes for the legal world.

Many philosophers, from antiquity to the present day, have delved into the study of duties and virtues, seeking to find motivations and grounds for our moral behavior. Some have sought foundations for our moral behavior in the metaphysical or divine, others have preconized that they derive from our feelings, from our naked and cold human nature, or from our sociability and interpersonal relationships.

From this, centered on the theme of ethics, this article seeks, as its general objective, to present some reflections on duty ethics and virtue ethics, their differences, and how different authors have grounded the origin of our moral behaviors, and of our virtues.

At its core, the study questions whether modern conceptions are innovations to the thought of ancient authors and whether there is, in fact, any marked difference in the ethical conceptions of modernity compared to those of antiquity.

To develop this reflection, the following specific objectives were established: a) to study the differences between duty ethics and virtue ethics; b) to know how some philosophers approached virtue in antiquity; c) to know some modern philosophers' ideas about virtue; d) to analyze and reflect on the contrast between "ancient" and "modern" ideas in the field of ethics, duties and virtues.

A central reflection of the study argues that many of the ideas of modern authors had already been described by the authors of antiquity. However, it was also possible to observe that there is a striking difference that separates the conception of ethics between antiquity and modernity, according to the authors studied, which is the high degree of subjectivism of modern authors.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the study was developed from a bibliographical research, under the hypothetical-deductive method.

## **II. Considerations about duty and virtue**

Philosophy has been focusing on the study of duties and virtues since the beginning of philosophical thought. It is possible to find direct or indirect considerations on the notion of duty and virtue in Plato, Aristotle, the Stoic school, Cicero, the scholastics, the jusnaturalist school, and modernity, among others.

There is not always a clear separation between duty ethics and virtue ethics. In some authors like Aristotle (2015), virtue ethics appears comprehensively. In others like Cicero (2017), duties appear in a latent form, describing almost a manual of how to live well, even without losing sight, in many cases, of their identity with virtues.

Proposing to establish some distinctions between duty and virtue ethics, Hooft (2013, p. 18-74) lists numerous differences, namely:

- a) while duty ethics defines the scope of morality, virtue ethics extends beyond the moral sphere;
- b) much of the former focuses on our obligation to others, while the latter encompasses the agent's self;
- c) the central question of duty ethics is "what should I do?", whereas virtue ethics will consider what kind of person the individual should be and what kind of life he or she should lead;
- d) duty ethics uses deontic terms like "right and wrong," but virtue ethics uses terms like "virtuous," "good," and "admirable," referring to the internal state of the agent;
- e) duty ethics is eminently concerned with action, while virtue ethics focuses more on the agent;
- f) in duty ethics moral goodness is defined by what is demanded by the moral law or moral principles and rules, but virtue ethics works with ideals of goodness for human beings;
- g) When we act morally, we feel a duty to do what is required in a given situation. This is what is called "practical necessity". Duty ethics conceives of the nature of this necessity as a feeling that one "must" act in accordance with the duty instituted by the moral norm. Virtue ethics, on the other hand, conceives of the virtuous agent "wanting" to do what morality requires. That is to say, while the former conceives practical necessity as obedience to rules, the latter conceives it as the ability to respond promptly to values;
- h) In duty ethics, rules are conceived as absolutely obligatory. Virtue ethics considers duties from the agent's point of view and always allows the agent to judge their strictness;
- i) While duty ethics is universal in form, virtue ethics focuses on the particularity of situations;
- j) In duty ethics the emphasis is on reason, but virtue ethics looks at positive emotions;
- k) The perspective of justice involves duty ethics, while care is in virtue ethics
- l) Duty ethics conceives of a morality external to us, while virtue ethics is inclined to suggest that if morality exists, it is within us. In this sense, it is worth noting that the former tends to appeal to metaphysical doctrines, while the latter is based on real life as it is lived and on the institutions of men in society;
- m) Individuals, in duty ethics, are conceived as social atoms connected by rights, duties and obligations; virtue ethics conceives individuals as interdependent and social beings in their own being;
- n) Duty ethics insists that if an action is right for one person, then it would be right for anyone in the same circumstances; virtue ethics, on the other hand, sees judgments as complex, multi-leveled, and sensitive, with decisions being peculiar to situations, not general in form.

In the above list of differences, it is easy to notice that a central and striking point between duty ethics and virtue ethics lies in the fact that, although both are in the field of morality, the former is more objectivist, while the latter is more subjectivist.

These different aspects of one and the other can be more clearly understood by studying how different philosophers have conceived ethics over the centuries.

For the present study, the differences between duty ethics and virtue ethics are of less importance, although the focus, especially of the contemporary authors, who will be presented next, is more delimited within the scope of virtue ethics. This is because the object here is not to establish differences and qualifications of both categories, but - from the more accurate knowledge of their fields of action, from the point of view of different authors, to establish some brief reflections on the idea of duty and virtue, from ancient to modern<sup>1</sup>.

Before proceeding, it is worth mentioning that the present study does not exhaust all the authors who have dealt with ethics of duty and virtue over the centuries, but only alludes to a few relevant ones, allowing us to reflect on the evolution of ideas over the millennia and how far we have come today.

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<sup>1</sup>The designation "modern" in this study does not refer exclusively to the period of modernity, but is intended only to contrast with the period of antiquity, and can therefore encompass both modernity and contemporaneity.

### **III. Virtue in antiquity**

The understanding of how thoughts about duties and virtues evolved from antiquity to the present day necessarily involves two ideas from Plato that shaped Western thought for centuries and that, according to Hoofstede (2013, p. 124), promoted a gradual reduction of the importance of virtue in favor of the notion of duty. This is the idea of transcendent reality stamped in Plato's Cave Myth and described under the "Ideal Form," which is only accessed by the philosopher through reason (wisdom).

These two ideas - transcendent reality and access to it by reason - evidently lean toward a conception geared toward the ethics of duty, because, as already noted in the previous topic of this study, it works as a universal morality and more objective in circumstances, something compatible with Plato's understanding of the transcendent reality of virtues.

Another point that reinforces Plato's (2010, p. 221) perspective on duty ethics is in his view about laws. According to him, the fundamental purpose of laws is that citizens be as happy as possible and united in mutual friendship in the highest degree. In this context, "the virtuous man is he who goes through life consistently obeying the legislator's written rules as given in his legislation, approval and disapproval.

The ultimate proof of this morality directed at respect for the norm - ethics of duty - is given by Plato (2015) in the Dialogue Criton in which Socrates insists on the moral conception of respect for the norm, even in the face of the injustice of his imprisonment.

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Aristotle, for his part, left a more profound work on ethical thought. A complete analysis of his *Nicomachean Ethics* would certainly not fit in this article. Even so, some central considerations of Aristotle's thought are possible, including some coming from the work "Politics", in order to better clarify some points of his thought.

Aristotle (2009, p. 95-97) states that the reason men establish civil society is so that everyone can live happily and independently. However, for him, to live well is to live happily and virtuously. Therefore, it must be admitted in principle that honest and virtuous actions, not only common life, are the scope of political society.

In the ethical field, Aristotle (2015, p. 281) conceives that the goal of virtue is to be happy and it is only possible to be happy by being good. However, it is necessary to understand that happiness as a result of a virtuous life is not only an internal feeling of the individual, since Aristotle, on the basis of the Greek thought of the time, conceived happiness in objective and social terms, i.e., it was a state conceived in social life (HOOFSTED, 2013, p. 121).

Thus, capturing the conception of virtue in ethics and combining it with his political vision, one can observe that for Aristotle (2015, p. 18) the search for moral fulfillment of the individual - living a virtuous life to find happiness - is inserted in the political achievement of the city (polis). He is categorical in stating that even if the good is identical for both the citizen and the city, it is better and more perfect to understand and preserve that of the city, because if it is beautiful to content an individual, it is even more beautiful to content a nation.

Because of this, the philosopher states that "it seems that the political man is also the one who has been best educated according to virtue, since it wishes to make citizens good and obedient to the laws" (ARISTOTELES, 2015, p. 37).

When speaking of virtue, one must understand that for Aristotle (2015, p. 54-57) virtue is a middle ground between two vices: excess and scarcity. It follows that virtue is in an intermediate position, whether in the passions or in actions.

Thus, to be virtuous is constant work and demands from the individual constant attention against excesses and faults (in the sense of scarcity) in actions, passions and conduct in general. The result of this constant work is happiness.

From this observation, Aristotle (2015, p. 73) imputes to each individual a personal and direct responsibility for his conduct, character, and destiny, recognizing that "men who lead a relaxed existence are personally responsible for having themselves become relaxed, or for becoming unjust or intemperate" [...] for "it is by the exercise of particular actions that they acquire a character of the same kind as themselves. [...] Thus, only a senseless person refuses to recognize that it is by the exercise of such particular actions that dispositions of character are formed."

It can be seen, therefore, that virtue is the individual's guiding line in society, the virtuous being the one who respects the laws and acts by a middle ground. Moreover, the most perfect virtue for Aristotle (2015, p. 137) is justice, thus understood as a matter of proportionality, giving to each one neither more nor less than what is due to him.

In this context, one can see that Aristotle imbues his notion of duty with the virtuous conduct of the individual within society. The individual has the duty to conduct himself in a virtuous way, obeying the laws,

giving priority to the collective interest over the individual, always conducting himself by a middle way, whose most excellent form is justice, thus understood in the version of proportionality. This is how he will find the goal of virtue: happiness.

Further on in the understanding of the ancient conception of virtue and duty, it is worth mentioning the Stoics. The philosophers of this school "suggested that human beings should shape their lives according to the eternal order of nature" (HOOFT, 2013, p. 125).

The Stoics constructed an interesting notion of duty from the extension of the principle of appropriation to the principle of familiarity, arguing that the individual in nature cannot think only of himself, but has an obligation to think also of his own reproduction, so that he must turn to his fellow human beings to recognize them as such. It follows that appropriation shifts from a "self-love" to a "love of another" and from a conservative function of the individual to a deontological one, embodied in duties towards others (RADICE, 2016, p. 120).

This biological perspective ends up resulting in at least two aspects: the definition of who is our familiar and the tendency to associate. From this, when one moves to the field of human morality, these two issues (familiarity and sociability) become conscious and rational, becoming virtue: the first leads to cosmopolitanism and egalitarianism; the second to man's political vocation (RADICE, 2016, p. 122).

This notion of cosmopolitanism and sociability appears in Epithetus when he argues that morality cannot be preserved except by extending self-interest to an interest that also includes that of the other. Epithetus and Marcus Aurelius propose that human identity should be considered an integral part of the world and that he who stands apart separates himself from reason, for reason is common to all. Because of this, although individual centers of action, but as rational beings, we are part of the rest of the human race, so that each should conceive of himself working for the joint good (LONG, 2013, p. 202).

From all this, but in the more specific field of duty, it is possible to observe that the Stoics used a criterion for evaluating the right actions according to the intention, which made an action, apparently good, cease to be good if the intention of who performed it was not noble. However, this criterion led to the problem that, if there was a good intention, bad actions could be justifiable (such as, for example, murder) (RADICE, 2016, p. 140-143).

As this perspective brought more problems than solutions, the need arose for a subsequent category, that of duties. In this way, the notion of duty was defined as an act that could be rationally justified. This means that the duty could be connoted positively or negatively in itself, as an act, and not only according to the intention of who performed it (RADICE, 2016, p. 140-143).

According to Radice (2016) later the Stoics began to approximate the notion of righteous actions with that of duties, creating the figure of the "perfect duties" (which would be equivalent to righteous actions), which are those in accordance with virtue; and the "intermediate duties" for those actions deprived of virtue. From this construction the Stoics created the figure of the man in progress, that is, the man toward wisdom, since they conceived the wise man as morally perfect.

Whereas from Plato to the Stoics the transcendent reality of the good life is a more vague concept, with the rise of Christianity and its theological philosophy (especially in St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas) this idea of the good life becomes more specific, since it is directed to God.

St. Augustine's thought characterizes a separation between virtue and the political-state, linking virtue to a transcendental and intertemporal element that is life in God. This does not mean to say that virtue (and, so to speak, the correlated duties) ceases to be a social act, but it does mean that it becomes an act directed toward an end, which is the search for the divine.

Indeed, in the work *City of God*, Augustine (2017, p. 207/204) separates humanity into two groups (cities). One of these groups lives "according to God." The other group lives "according to man." The first group belongs to the city of God, to which men are led who live for the love of God, despising themselves. The second group constitutes the city of men, for it is made up of those who live in self-love, despising God.

This division between two cities evokes much more than a religious perspective, but a conception of conduct, for charity and piety are in the city of those who love God, while vices and human pride are in the city of men.

Furthermore, St. Augustine's (2017, p. 460-461) perspective implies man's constant struggle, a struggle that takes place between virtue and vice. He argues that virtues such as temperance, prudence, and justice are under continuous affront from human appetites, and it is up to man to constantly work for the restraint of these appetites. There is a clear goal in this: the finding of eternal peace in the city of God.

St. Thomas Aquinas (2016, v.2), in turn, represented the climax of philosophical-theological thought. In his *Summa Theologica*, in the *Prima Secundae* (I-II), Aquinas initially addresses the purpose of life, which consists in beatitude. Next, he deals with what human actions consist of, which are divided into the voluntary (6-21) and the passions (22-48). Next he describes the principles of human action, which can be internal and external. The internal ones are the powers and habits (48-89). The external principle that moves man to

goodness is God; this movement can be through the instruction of the law (90-108) or with the assistance of grace (109-14).

It is possible to perceive in the work of Aquinas (2016, p. 53) the tradition inaugurated by St. Augustine of separating the things of God and the things of the world. While Augustine spoke of seeking eternal peace in the city of God, Aquinas speaks of seeking beatitude, which is the most sublime form of encounter with God, through knowledge of the divine essence.

The attainment of beatitude is through virtuous actions (2016, p. 53). St. Thomas (2016, p. 326) understands virtue as a good quality of the mind by which we live righteously. In this regard, it must be said that his view conceives both the perspective of perfect virtue, existing in God, but does not overlook the conception of man as a political animal, apparently picked from Aristotle, who lives according to his imperfect nature St. Thomas (2016, p. 364).

As can be seen, all the conceptions described above have, in some way, a closer relationship with the ethics of duty, given their evaluations of morality in transcendental terms (abstract or in God), expressing a more general and objective ethics.

Hooft (2013, p. 126-127) states that these conceptions are not sufficient today, whose central problem is concerned with our responsibilities and duties to others in ethical terms, without appeal to supernatural or normative realities.

In this context, a simple incursion into modern and contemporary thought about virtue ethics is necessary, something that will allow, in the sequence of this study, a reflective view on the ancient and modern approaches to the ethical problem.

#### **IV. Virtue in contemporary thought**

In modern and contemporary thought on ethics, the approach of this study is limited to the works of David Hume, Friedrich Nietzsche, Emmanuel Lévinas and Paul Ricoeur, given the relevance and philosophical expression of such authors, as well as the possibility that they allow, both to conceive an evolution of thought among them, as well as to reveal how the thought on ethics has developed until today.

David Hume inaugurates a new form of ethical vision, rejecting metaphysical speculation, whether in the religious realm or in the idea of extracting virtue as arising from reason.

Hume (2009, p. 497) rejects the idea that the notion of virtue is derived from reason, that is, that through reason one can distinguish between moral good and evil that guide virtues. This is because, since morality has influence over actions and affections, influencing passions and actions, going beyond the calm and impassive judgments of the understanding, it follows that it cannot be derived from reason, since reason alone could not have such influence. Reason would be totally impotent in this respect, which shows that the rules of morality are not conclusions of reason.

In view of this, since it is not possible to discover vice and virtue through reason, Hume (2009, p. 617) states that they must be discovered through some impression or feeling capable of establishing such a difference. For him, this feeling is sympathy, something very powerful in human nature and which influences our feeling of morality in all artificial virtues. He argues that it has enough power to provide the most different feelings of approval, influencing our moral judgments, being the main source of moral distinctions, because it promotes interest in the just, in the public good, in the happiness of others (HUME, 2009, p. 657-658).

If Hume presents an optimistic view of human nature through the idea of sympathy, Friedrich Nietzsche (2015, p. 153) walks in the opposite direction, with a pessimistic and individualistic view. According to him, one should avoid the "colorful phrasing" of morality, whose "verbal parade" is nothing but "old false ornaments" that prevent one from seeing man according to his original nature.

Nietzsche works with the idea of "will to power" as the basic motivation that drives human beings. He states that human beings are subject to both rational motivations, in the sense that they are cognitively goal-directed, and desirous motivations, in the sense that they only seek what they want (HOOFT, 2013, p. 133).

In this sense, morality involves the idea of commanding and obeying (NIETZSCHE, 2015, p. 32), and morality can vary according to the dispositions that rest in each person. There is the "morality of the masters," dominant and present in those people who are not afraid to express their "will to power." On the other hand, there is the "morality of slaves", in which the author classifies weak people, who possess a herd mentality NIETZSCHE, p. 192-195.

But this does not mean that for Nietzsche the morality of the masters is superior to that of the slaves. He only recognizes it as more honest, because the will to power shines through, while the morality of slaves hides it, pretending to be humble while dominating its rival (HOOFT, 2013, p. 138).

Finally, it should be noted that Nietzsche (2015, p. 151-152) works the virtues through the idea of "free spirit": "that imperious thing that [...] desires to be its master internally and externally and to feel in command; it has the will to lead from multiplicity to simplicity, in an unraveling, imperious, and essentially dominating

connection of will." This is virtue as self-affirmation and acceptance of earthly existence as it actually is, without transcendental attachment. One prefers pride and authenticity to faith and charity; self-love to love for others; free individuals rather than bound by moral norms; acceptance of the suffering of human existence as part of life rather than natural or supernatural solutions or designs (HOOFT, 2013, p. 140).

One can thus note the contrast of Hume's doctrine, grounded in sympathy, versus Nietzsche's, based on the "will to power." Besides the excessive pessimism and individualism of the latter, there is a great obstacle in his conception, notably the "question of the other". This is because, in this individualistic (and selfish) view of the world, the existence of others becomes a problem, a constant threat to "my will to power". In this thinking, the world becomes almost an eternal "state of war," to use an expression of Hobbes (2015, p. 122).

And this notion (problem) of the "other" was worked out by Emmanuel Levinas. In contrast to the Nietzschean "I," Levinas works with the conception of our relation to the "other" as an ethical relation.

He starts from the idea that - unlike the other things in the world, such as objects and landscapes, which are cognizable to us through "our" own apprehension of the world - the face of the other is an expression that escapes our "apprehension" of the world, is an infinite for us, in the sense of inapprehensible to cognitive categories to the way we assimilate the other things in the world (LEVINAS, 2019, p. 188). From this, being is no longer a project of the self, but an openness to the mystery of the other, which represents an ethical behavior or stance (HOOFT, 2013, p. 150).

Moreover, Levinas (2019, p. 196-197) raises the issue of dialogue - listening to the other - as an ethical stance of respect and openness, also not framable in the idea of appropriation of the world by one being. This is another contrast with Nietzsche's will to power, for in a Nietzschean world, there would only be speakers, not listeners (HOOFT, 2013, p. 152).

Finally, it is worth noting one more difference between Levinas and Nietzsche. In the latter's individualistic conception, there is the "I" as will to power, seeing the world in the first person singular. In contrast, Levinas (LEVINAS, 2019, p. 195) sees an ethical call in the interpellation of the "I" by the "other," since this interpellation shapes the way we express ourselves. In this way, my ethical stance is not just a self-assertion (will to power), but a response to the call of the other (HOOFT, 2013, p. 154-155). This response may stem from an implicit request for help, which arouses solicitude, kindness.

This response to the call of the "other" is embodied in an openness to the other, which implies a careful response to the other's call. When we mature, we begin to respond to the vulnerability of others, because it is constantly before us, awakening a sense of responsibility and constituting us as ethical beings. Our virtuous character is an expression of this way of being with others (HOOFT, 2013, p. 156-157).

Levinas' view on ethics presents an important element, which is sociability, embodied in the relationship with other human beings, thus going beyond the search for individual happiness, Hume's feeling of sympathy, or Nietzsche's will to power (individualistic and even pessimistic).

Hooft (2013, pp. 161-165), however, raises a relevant issue: the question of the impersonal relations of modern society. He claims that Aristotle (happiness and friendship), Hume (sympathy), and Levinas (face-to-face relations) do not allow one to contemplate the totality of the phenomenon of impersonality in modern life, especially in large societies. For him, in these large societies relations with others, with social justice and humanity in general are not at issue on the basis of the above elements, but on the basis of justice. This is because the moral status of individuals in these societies is grounded on the existence of rights, common to all.

In this context, a reconciliation would be necessary between the elements classically listed by the aforementioned authors, with the new elements present in the current modern and plural societies, arranged under impersonality and the empire of equality and justice.

A possible answer can be found in Paul Ricoeur's thought. This author starts from a hermeneutic interpretation of the Aristotelian ethics of eudaimonia (happiness) as a life goal for everyone, but taking into account the multiplicity of aspects of life and different social roles played by people, whether in the private or public sphere.

In "The self as other," Ricoeur (2014, p. 186) starts from the idea of "ethical aim," which means "the aim of the 'good life' with and for others in just institutions. This ethical aim articulates an ethical longing that can be conceived as "living well, with and for others, in just institutions" (HOOFT, 2013, p. 167).

It should be noted that such a perspective addresses the happiness of a life, as the goal of human beings, not only in the realm of personal and individual fulfillment, but also in their interpersonal relationships (the self and the other), as well as in the different aspects of life in modern and current society, in which ethics also involves a perspective of social justice and equality (RICOEUR, 2014, p. 186-225).

This broader ethical vision allows us to conceive human existence as a project of "oneself" and as "care for others," being realized in the way each one seeks to live well, both "with others" and "for others" in just (social) institutions. It is, then, a broader ethic that involves both what we do in the family sphere and the role we play in an important public office (HOOFT, 2013, p. 168-169).

This ethical vision of Ricoeur, as can be noted, is fundamentally based on Aristotle's conception of virtue. Considering this ethical goal of living well (with and for others in just institutions), it is possible to glimpse that these traits of living well are the virtues in the multiple domains of life (individual, interpersonal and community).

From the construction of ideas presented so far, it is possible to establish some reflections on duty and virtue ethics, especially considering the ancient and current views exposed here, but a way of taking into account a critical look at all the ideas presented.

## V. Possible reflections on the ideas presented

As we have seen up to this point, different authors have worked on the problems surrounding ethics throughout the evolution of philosophical thought.

The knowledge of these different visions allows some reflections on duty ethics and virtue ethics, which are the central object of this study.

A first necessary reflection is to establish a contrast between the "ancient" and the "modern" in order to know if there is, in fact, anything new in the latter. It is a matter, then, of critically analyzing the content of the thought of modern authors in itself and verifying its relationship with the thought of the ancients.

When asking whether there is something new in modernity, the answer must be affirmative, but this new is not exactly what it appears to be. New, one might say, is exaggerated subjectivism, for almost all the content of what is spoken of today has already been, in some way, dealt with by the ancients.

David Hume advocated a view of virtue ethics founded on feelings, notably sympathy. He claimed it to be a strong enough feeling to move people toward ethical behavior.

Indeed, sympathy can explain much of the behavior we develop in society. But is it strong enough to underlie them all? How can we explain the conduct of those individuals who act benevolently toward strangers and with total contempt for those close to them who, in theory, would tend to be more sympathetic?

Indeed, sympathy is an important feeling and motivator of moral conduct, but it seems to be too simple to account for all the multiple and complex human relationships.

Nietzsche, in turn, presented a vision that he believed to be realistic of human nature, with its individualism and egoism, painting a picture in which individuals live only under their project of self-affirmation. This bleak view of human nature does not support an ethic that expresses itself in otherness, and is perhaps only useful for someone who lives "alone in the world. Moreover, where is the will to power in the conduct of those selfless people who, for example, give themselves completely for the benefit of others? What will to power could justify someone putting his own life at risk, and even losing it, to save a stranger?

Nietzsche's reflections are not supported by a more complete picture of human life, in interpersonal relationships, serving more as a mirror of personalities disturbed by egocentrism.

Levinas presents a work focused on our relationships with others. It must be said that his thought is confusing. It is not uncommon to find in the work "Totality and Infinity" a number of sentences, paragraphs, and even whole pages written in a completely illogical language. Many times his text looks like a heap of words without any concreteness.

In spite of this, the fiction (the face) through which he presents the idea of the infinitude of the human soul, impassible of "apprehension" by the other, is a relevant and true reflection. It is not given to us to enter into the intimacy of the other and know him or her completely.

On the other hand, our personal relationships, our interlocutions arouse ethical behavior, whether by Hume's sympathy, by the will of imposition as Nietzsche wanted, or for any reason that arouses in us a relationship between the "I" and the "other".

Ricoeur sought to extend his relationships broader than the interpersonal, notably in relations of large communities and institutions. Moreover, he instilled in this stance of "living well" life in the "self," in the "other," and "for the other" (something far beyond Nietzsche) on just grounds. This inclusion of justice in "my life," in "our life," and in "the life of society" can be understood as a parameterization, that is, under which bases one should understand the good life.

However, after this brief reflection, the question comes back: are these ideas really new? Are they really an evolution of the thought of the ancients, as argued by Hoofstede (2013, p. 185)? The answer is "no."

As already noted in topic 2 of this study, the Greeks have already dealt with virtually all these issues, including those properly contained in Ricoeur's "ethical visage."

The Greeks' understanding of happiness was not of a happy life only individually. The texts by Plato (2014, p. 163-203) and Aristotle (2009, p. 16-17) always focus on the primacy of the collective over the individual and that living well involved living well in society.

If one considers Aristotle's idea of living a virtuous life for the pursuit of happiness and combines this with the primacy of the community over the individual, it is obviously possible to infer that happiness is also a collective expression, not something merely individual.

If Ricoeur formulated a hermeneutic interpretation of Aristotelian happiness (HOOFT, 2013, p. 166), it would not be forbidden to also make such an interpretation of the importance of friendship in Aristotle's ethics (2015, p. 209-238.). The value of friendship transcends the simple fact of having a friend, but must encompass the value of raising friends, giving due importance and consideration to "others."

Would not the trace of the infinitude of the face of the "other," dealt with by Levinas, in the realm of interpersonal relationships, be encompassed in a more general context of friendship? It is a matter of thinking of the other as a possible next friend and, like this, how an ethical relationship can come to transform a sporadic interpersonal contact into friendship. And there is no reason to doubt that this contact also involves sympathy. Perhaps the importance that Aristotle gives to friendship can give foundation to our ethical posture with the other, awakening solicitude, as Levinas calls it, as being that awakened through language, through interpellation. The words are changed, but the meaning remains.

On the other hand, it is worth remembering Ricoeur's ethical vision, separating it into three parts: a) my good life; b) with and for others; c) in just institutions.

The "good life" is in the project of each individual that, in the end, is the happy life, as described by Aristotle. Ricoeur's hermeneutic interpretation essentially starts from this idea, combining it with the idea of ethical stance "with and for others". In this case, it can be argued that Aristotle did not fail to combine the notion of individual happiness with the perspective of the other. This is because, as said lines ago, the Greek conception of happiness was not individualistic, but collectivistic. The notion of the primacy of the collective over the individual was present. Plato was emphatic about this in the dialogue Criton, preferring an unjust death to fleeing from it by violating the law and the social order, thus indicating the notion that an individual injustice might not represent an injustice in the social order, in the collectivity in general. For Aristotle (2015, p. 18), one had to be virtuous to be happy; and to be virtuous one had to cultivate the common good. For him, the search for the moral fulfillment of the individual is embedded in the political fulfillment of the city (polis). This involves caring for oneself and for others. To reinforce this, he stressed the importance of friendship, which reveals his concern with ethical behavior in our social relations.

With regard to the third aspect (just institutions), Ricoeur intends to further extend the ethical posture to the relationships of the whole community, based on the rights of each one, on impartiality and justice.

On such a point, it should be recalled that Aristotle (2015, p. 125) described justice as the greatest of all virtues. He said that it is the most perfect virtue, because he who possesses it is able to make use of this virtue, not only for himself, but also for others.

Plato (2010, p. 75/221), in turn, gave enormous importance to the just social order, to the observance of laws, because they aim at virtue as a whole, and their fundamental purpose is that citizens be as happy as possible, united in the highest degree of mutual friendship.

One can notice, therefore, that the inclusion of ethical life with and for others under just institutions was not a novelty introduced by Ricoeur, but an idea already described by Aristotle.

It is also possible to remember that the importance of sociability in ethical relations is not a novelty created by modern authors. As noted in topic 2, the Stoics have already dealt with the subject with emphasis, building the notion of duty (ethical relationship) from the extension of the principle of appropriation to the principle of familiarity, arguing that the individual in nature cannot think only of himself, but is obliged to think also of his own reproduction, so that he must turn to his fellows to recognize them as such. From this it follows that appropriation moves from a "self-love" to a "love of another" and from a conservative function of the individual to a deontological one, embodied in duties towards others (RADICE, 2016, p. 12).

In this conception of the Stoics, it is precisely both the project of the self and our relationship with the other. Of course they started from a biological perspective, but this does not prevent the hermeneutic interpretation of their ideas, conceiving with this, our perspective of familiarity and sociability. When individuals become aware of these two perspectives (familiarity and sociability), their internalization leads to cosmopolitanism and egalitarianism, and the political vocation of man (RADICE, 2016, p. 122).

There is enormous similarity of both Levinas' and Ricoeur's notion of the "self and the other" with what Epithet said when he argues that morality cannot be preserved except by extending self-interest to an interest that also includes that of the other. Still, it is worth repeating what was said in topic 2: Epithetus and Marcus Aurelius propose that human identity should be considered as an integral part of the world and that the one who stands apart separates himself from reason, because reason is common to all. Because of this, although individual centers of action, but as rational beings, we are part of the rest of the human race, so that each should conceive of himself working for the common good (LONG, 2013, p. 202).



It can be seen, therefore, that virtue ethics, as modernly conceived, in general terms, by the authors studied in this article, differs almost in no way from the classical conceptions already inaugurated by the authors in antiquity, except, perhaps, in a significant point: the excessive subjectivism.

Virtue ethics, as it was already possible to infer in topic 1 of this study, has a greater degree of subjectivity than duty ethics. It so happens that the current authors mentioned in this research, especially Levinas and Ricoeur, with the purpose of total detachment of ethics from its metaphysical origins, have taken the ideas to an even greater degree of subjectivity, perhaps to a dangerous degree in which the subjectivity of each one as an ethical being compromises the existence of a minimum degree of objectivity necessary for virtues. The breakdown of this minimum parameter could lead to such a subjective assessment of what is right and wrong, just and unjust, prudent and imprudent, benevolent and mean, and so on, that virtue itself would no longer be identifiable as such.

Ricoeur himself (2013, p. 175) was concerned with this, recognizing "that moral thinking requires a degree of objectivity about ourselves and an ability to transcend our desires and inclinations."

The philosophers studied here, from Hume to Ricoeur, have all sought to reject the idea of an abstract, metaphysical or theological higher reason as motivating or guiding our ethical stances. It is impossible to say whether they are right or wrong. Whether or not there is a metaphysical abstraction guiding the world. This even involves faith and religion.

What we intend to argue here is that the conception of the ancients - who extracted virtue from reason, as a metaphysical conception, or even from divine designs - served in some way as a guide for moral behavior. One can think of them as references, as limits, as a compass for the moral orientation of individuals.

Society as a whole has always used references for its moral and intellectual evolution. High culture (paintings, sculptures, theater, literature, music), for example, has always served as a reference for the beautiful. As Scruton (2013, p. 139-143) says, beauty, exemplified in supreme artistic achievements, is one of the greatest gifts that life gives us. He further states that art can even present important moral messages, as long as it does so sincerely.

Furthermore, moral references have always been present in the examples of life. Ethical references of people who were selfless in caring for the sick, those who dedicated entire lives to charity, who fought to the death against injustice, the real-life heroes who shaped the construction of entire countries, or a simple father who died to save his son; in short, one could cite countless examples of moral references that have guided the collective imagination throughout the centuries. They are true sources of inspiration for the moral conduct of each person.

When moral behavior loses its north, it can become adrift. If the individual's ethics are adrift, if they are totally based on his subjectivity, what prevents him from acting without any moral restraint? Is our autonomy, as Ricoeur (2013, p. 175) understood, capable of controlling our desires and inclinations, our appetites (to use Plato's expression)?

In this walk, it is worth recalling a valuable lesson from Viktor Frankl (2019, p. 123-140) about the meaning of life, the search for meaning, and existential emptiness. He argues that there is a huge contingent of people who cannot find meaning in their lives. They live in an existential emptiness. The author states that the meaning of life can be found: "1) by creating a job or performing an act; 2) by experiencing something or meeting someone; 3) by the attitude we take toward suffering.

Ofcourse, muchofthis taskoffinding meaning in life involves ethical stances. Frankl (2019, p. 116) makes numerous references to ethical behavior in the concentration camp where he was imprisoned. All of these postures have some relationship to the "self" and the "other" within the framework of duty and virtue ethics.

The question that arises in the face of the modern subjectivist conception of virtue ethics is whether people will be able to find or give meaning to their lives without a minimum moral framework, without a north that serves as a moral reference for their attitudes, that guides the virtuous conduct of each one.

Perhaps Plato and the other authors of antiquity were not wrong when they established abstract or divine references for morals, because they knew the importance and the need for such references to be established in our minds as ideals to be pursued. Perhaps, finding meaning in life itself involves conceiving transcendental ideals that constrain us to control our appetites.

The present study does not pretend to give this answer, for it may even be impossible to find. What matters here is the reflection on duty and virtue.

Finally, it is worth saying that perhaps it is not necessary to choose which of them (duty or virtue ethics) would be better, but to conceive of them together, understanding that in some situations duty ethics will have a better effect - as it occurs in the legislative perspective and in scenes of formal egalitarianism - while virtue ethics, given its focus on relativism and on the inner complex of the individual, may have a place in the particular circumstances of each human being, at its core, and in social interrelationships of a material egalitarian nature.

Perhaps an example can better clarify this idea, especially the relation of ethics to different equalities: it is wrong to imagine that material equality is an evolution or better than formal equality; each social

scenario demands one or the other. In an electoral context, formal equality is imperative, because a difference in weight between votes could never be conceived, as an idea of material equality might suggest. Likewise, in this kind of social context, the ethics of duty is more appropriate, since it would not allow subjectivism and would impose an equal morality for that situation. On the other hand, changing the scenario in which two men each commit a crime of theft, but the first does it out of extreme hunger and the second does it out of sheer turpitude, one is of course faced with a view of material equality and, as such, virtue ethics, subjectively conceiving each of them, can show a huge difference for similar social interactions.

In any case, it is necessary to keep in mind that paying attention to virtues is a key element for a healthy social coexistence, that moral references have a relevant role in our lives and can give a direction for the realization of our project of happiness.

## VI. Conclusion

This article proposed to study the ethics of duty and virtue, their differences, some ancient and modern authors who proposed their different versions and, in its central focus, to present some reflections on virtue and duty, especially contrasting the ideas of modernity with those of antiquity.

Duty ethics and virtue ethics, although both are in the field of morality, have numerous differences, but the most striking of them is that duty ethics is more universal, objective, and normative, while virtue ethics is more simple, singular, and subjective. While the former focuses on what one "ought to do", the latter focuses on "living well".

Countless philosophers have addressed the topic of duties and virtues. The ancients (Plato, Aristotle, Stoics, St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas) presented their conceptions of virtue under a metaphysical or theological ordering, notably inclined to the ethics of duty. Modern authors (David Hume, Nietzsche, Levi and Ricoeur), on the other hand, tried to get away from the idea that ethics originated in supra-sensible elements, basing it in the scope of our relationship with others, in sociability and in the feelings that move us.

In the course of reflections on the contrasts of the authors studied, it was possible to realize that the vast majority of the conceptions of modern authors were already present in the ideas of the ancient authors. Notions of sociability, relevance of the "other" and of friendship, search for happiness, not only individually, but also conceived collectively, primacy of the collective over the individual, notions of cosmopolitanism, relevance of justice as the greatest virtue and of the just law as the promoter of happiness, are all elements contained in the thought of the ancient authors studied and that were repeated by the modern authors.

It was observed, on the other hand, that the moderns presented a degree of distinction from the ancients, especially in the field of virtue ethics, which is the high subjectivism of their ethical conceptions.

It was pointed out that this subjectivism can present risks of trivializing moral concepts, given the risk of losing the moral references that, throughout history, have guided people's virtuous conduct.

Besides, it was observed the possibility of the excessive subjectivism of modern ethics emptying its own content and the reason for being or acting of each one, something that compromises the achievement or intimate discovery of the meaning of each person's life.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that these reflections are not presented as definitive answers to the questions and points made, but under the viewpoint of pure philosophical and interrogative reflection, in order to promote the discussion of these ideas in the academic field.

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