OBJECTS, NATURE AND METHOD OF ETHICS AS A RATIONAL SCIENCE

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1. OBJECTS OF ETHICAL INQUIRY

First, we need—based on our moral experience and pre-understanding of ethics—to clarify the question which objects ethics investigates. For it is only when we have as distinct as possible a knowledge of the objects of ethical inquiry that we can have a chance to find precisely those methods that suit to the subject-matter of ethics. Now the answer to the question what the object of ethics is seems to be simple:

A. The ‘good’ (value) as object of ethics?

“Ethics studies the good,” or: “ethics investigates value”, sounds like the correct answer to our query. But this response to our question is for various reasons not precise enough and hence not simply and straightforwardly correct; in fact, if this answer either wants (a) to encompass the whole subject matter of ethics, or if it (b) even just wants to tell us what is the most specific object of ethics, it is incorrect for a number of reasons, although such great ethicists as Aristotle and G.E. Moore may have accepted a similar answer.

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See Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, (London University Press, 1962), I, 2: “If, then, there is some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake (everything
1) Not all Goods and Values are Objects of Ethics

In the first place, there are many values and goods, whose analysis clearly falls outside the scope ethics, for example ontological, aesthetic or intellectual values, or the value of physical strength.

Also the life of plants clearly possesses value but the value of oak-trees, or of fish that live 600 miles under the surface of the sea are not, as such, objects of ethics. Thus ethics does not consider the whole world of the good or all values. Rather, it has to do mainly with a very singular type of goodness that is related to human actions. But even this restriction of the object-sphere of ethics is insufficient.

2) The insufficiency of defining the object of ethics as “a good related to human action”

A definition of the object of ethics as “the good related to human action” is also quite unsatisfactory. For there are many goods that are aimed at or realized in human actions, which are not part of the subject-matter of ethics. Think of all the useful objects produced or used by humans! Or think of the crafts that produce nice souvenirs of different countries or elegant and cozy sofas. The values realized in those human actions which produce these objects of modest aesthetic value or of use, either by making them (ποιεῖν) or by acting with respect to them (πράττειν), while being linked to human making and acting, do not fall, except under some very restricted aspects, into the subject matter of ethics. Analyses of creative artistic activity and of its different techniques and results, and of the values linked to them, belong to aesthetics or philosophical anthropology, not to ethics.

else being desired for the sake of this), and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (for at that rate the process would go on to infinity, so that our desire would be empty and vain, clearly this must be the good and the chief good. Will not the knowledge of it, then, have a great influence on life? Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what is right? If so, we must try, in outline at least, to determine what it is, and of which of the sciences or capacities it is the object. It would seem to belong to the most authoritative art and that which is most truly the master art.”


This does not exclude that some aspects of them (for example the ecological equilibrium or the role of plants as human food) possess some ethical significance of.

Again, this does not exclude that there exist also many connections between art and morality which can be investigated by ethics. Nevertheless, the aesthetic values per se are not part of the subject-matter of ethics.
3) Can the object of ethics be identified with “a good or values related to human moral action”? Three reasons for the insufficiency of defining the object of ethics in this way and the ambiguity of the notion of the good in classical and medieval ethics

We can therefore not help stating that the subject-matter of ethics can only be clearly grasped as such if we turn our mental eye to a very unique sphere of values, to an urphenomenon⁴, which cannot be reduced

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⁴ This is a most important notion phenomenologists owe to Goethe. See Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Zur Farbenlehre. Didaktischer Theil. Der Farbenlehre polemischer Theil. Geschichte der Farbenlehre. Nachträge zur Farbenlehre. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Sämtliche Werke in 40 Bänden (Stuttgart and Tübingen: J.G. Cotta'scher Verlag, 1840), Bde 37-40. Farbenlehre, II. Abtheilung, Nr. 177, Bd. 37, S. 68: “Wäre denn aber auch ein solches Urphänomen gefunden, so bleibt immer noch das Uebel, daß man es nicht als ein solches anerkennen will, daß wir hinter ihm und über ihm noch etwas Weiteres aufsuchen, da wir doch hier die Gränze des Schauens eingestehen sollten.”

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Goethes Gespräche mit Eckermann (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1921) S. 448: “Das Höchste, wozu der Mensch gelangen kann, ist das Erstaunen, und wenn das Urphänomen ihn in Erstaunen setzt, so sei er zufrieden; ein Höheres kann es ihm nicht gewähren, und ein Weiteres soll er nicht dahinter suchen; hier ist die Grenze. Aber den Menschen ist der Anblick eines Urphänomens gewöhnlich noch nicht genug, sie denken, es müsse noch weiter gehen, und sie sind den Kindern ähnlich, die, wenn sie in einen Spiegel geguckt, ihn sogleich umwenden, um zu sehen, was auf der anderen Seite ist.”

Farbenlehre, ibid., Nr. 177, Bd. 37, S. 68: “Der Naturforscher lasse die Urphänomene in ihrer ewigen Ruhe und Herrlichkeit dastehen, der Philosoph nehme sie in seine Region auf…”

Gespräche mit Eckermann, ibid., S. 639): “Ein einfaches Urphänomen aufzunehmen, es in seiner hohen Bedeutung zu erkennen und damit zu wirken, erfordert einen produktiven Geist, der vieles zu übersehen vermag, und ist eine seltene Gabe, die sich nur bei ganz vorzüglichen Naturen findet.”

(See also ebd., S. 432, 514, 567, 591.)

See also Farbenlehre, ibid., Einleitung, Bd. 37, S. 9: “Vom Philosophen glauben wir Dank zu verdienen, daß wir gesucht die Phänomene bis zu ihren Urquellen zu verfolgen, bis dorthin, wo sie bloß erscheinen und sind, und wo sich nichts weiter an ihnen erklären läßt…”

Farbenlehre, ebd., V, Abtheilung, Nr. 716, 720, Bd. 37, S. 232-233: “Er soll sich eine Methode bilden, die dem Anschauen gemäß ist; er soll sich hüten, das Anschauen in Begriffe, den Begriff in Worte zu verwandeln, und mit diesen Worten, als wären’s Gegenstände, umzugehen und zu verfahren…”

Kann dagegen der Physiker zur Erkenntniß desjenigen gelangen, was wir ein Urphänomen genannt haben, so ist er geborgen und der Philosoph mit ihm; denn er [der Physiolog] nimmt aus des Physikers Hand ein Letztes, das bei ihm nun ein erstes wird.”ibid., Nr. 175, Bd. 37, S. 67. Farbenlehre, ibid., Nr. 175, Bd. 37, S. 67: “Wir nennen sie Urphänomene, weil nichts in der Erscheinung über ihnen liegt…”

See Farbenlehre, ibid., Nr. 177, Bd. 37, S. 68:
to anything besides itself or to more general categories of human action: the *moral goodness*, of which, as we shall see, although it cannot be defined through anything else, we can say many things and in which we find many essential characteristics and essential laws which we can unfold in their evidence. We could then define the subject matter of ethics as those goods and values regarding human actions which pertain to the *urphenomenon* of moral goodness. But also this definition of the object of ethics is insufficient and incorrect for various reasons.

In the first place, ethics does not only investigate actions (in the strict sense of free human acts which aim at realizing some states of affairs extrinsic to these acts themselves), but also inner responses, the fundamental moral attitude, or morally good acts within human cognitive life and intellectual assent, etc.

Secondly, ethics also studies many phenomena that are not human acts at all – for example moral imperatives, oughts, the freedom of the will, etc. which are essentially related to moral human acts but not themselves acts.

Thirdly, and most importantly, within the more restricted goods (values) that fall within the subject-matter of ethics, we must sharply distinguish the *morally relevant goods (values)* that are to be discussed in ethics from the *moral goods (values)* and their bearers in the person, which constitute the core of the object of ethical inquiries. We need to

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point out here that in the very notion of the good, to which the supreme moral imperative refers, there remains a fundamental ambiguity in classical and medieval ethics to which we shall return.

We will have to make an important distinction within the meaning of the good, a truly classical distinction: the distinction between morally relevant goods and moral goods or moral goodness.7

Before analyzing the latter’s intelligible marks and the distinction between the two kinds of goods, we can identify a further reason why the object of ethics is not sufficiently characterized by the good, not even by the morally relevant and the moral values taken together.

4) Five kinds of objects of ethics

There is namely a further reason why not even this answer to our question suffices: Ethics investigates many objects which cannot be reduced to either what is morally relevant or to what is morally good. Ethics examines in depth chiefly five kinds of objects:

a. In the first place, ethics, as a discipline distinct from the more broadly foundational fields of epistemology, ontology, and philosophical anthropology, studies its own general foundational concepts and data, namely the good and value as such, as well as the fundamentally different meanings and categories of value and of the ‘good’ (or the important). Into this general theory of value and of the good falls also the question of the opposites of value: disvalue and evil. (Still broader and more general epistemological, anthropological, and ontological foundations may be included in ethical works as Prolegomena to ethics but fall outside the strict confines of ethics itself.)

b. In the second place, and more specifically, ethics studies that which is morally relevant, i.e., those goods, values, rights, and other phenomena from which moral calls and obligations issue, while frequently they are not themselves morally good (this object of ethics we have already briefly mentioned and will return to).

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7 Life, health, and the other goods to be realized by us certainly do have much to do with morality. They impose moral calls and moral imperatives on us. They are therefore morally relevant. But they are not morally good. And moral goodness is a far higher and more significant and entirely new value in comparison with those morally relevant goods which are not themselves morally good. Cf. Dietrich von Hildebrand, Ethics, ch. 19. See also, for the three meanings of moral relevance, his Moralia.
c. Within the realm of the factors which motivate moral acts but are distinct from moral values themselves, we find also other data such as different kinds of ‘oughts,’ imperatives, obligations, and consequences of moral goodness, such as happiness, etc.

d. Fourthly, ethics studies and investigates the objectivity and nature of the categories of the morally right and wrong acts. Inasmuch as actions are only objectively right or wrong, however, performing them does not yet necessarily give rise to morally good or evil acts in the acting person because, for example, he who acts ethically wrongly may be morally speaking innocent. He may not be in possession of the ethical knowledge and understanding necessary to become morally evil by doing what is morally wrong. Or his motivation, though he performs objectively right acts, may lack the conditions and necessary motivation for performing morally good acts.

e. Fifthly, and most importantly, ethics speaks of the morally good and evil acts themselves, of the virtues and vices, the good and evil attitudes, inner responses and actions of persons which produce external effects but which also can possess quite different good or evil motives that are decisive for their moral character. This realm of the urphenomenon of the properly moral good and evil, of its forms, spheres, and roots, then, forms the core of the subject matter of ethics, as we have already seen. Ethics has the lofty task of explaining the excellence of morally good acts and virtues that alone deserve to be called the real excellence (namely virtue, areté) of the human person, the moral goodness (virtue), which Socrates for the first time clearly raised to an ethical prise de conscience, to use a term of Jacques Maritain.

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8 See my thesis that seven distinct factors are morally relevant and thus ought to motivate the morally good (obligatory) action in Josef Seifert, Was ist und was motiviert eine sittliche Handlung? (What is and what Motivates a Moral Action?), (Salzburg: Universitätsverlag A. Pustet, 1976).

9 See on this also Roderick M. Chisholm, Ethics and Intrinsic Values, Edited and introduced by John R. White Philosophy and Realist Phenomenology. Studies of the International Academy of Philosophy in the Principality of Liechtenstein, vol. 12 (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2001), vol. XVII.

10 To some extent, some Presocratics, even among the materialist school, preceded Socrates even in the formulation that to commit injustice is a greater evil than to suffer it. Nonetheless, only (the Platonic?) Socrates gained the systematic prise de conscience of this moral sphere. The philosophical as well as linguistic revolution of the Socratic-Platonic transformation of the notion of (human) excellence (areté) – which only from Socrates on is recognized to be (moral) virtue as the only true
Ethicists often exclusively speak of that which is morally relevant. This is a mistake even though moral values usually appear ‘on the back’ of actions in human persons honestly commit themselves to the life, health, and well-being of others. But at the same time, in this free response of the person to morally relevant goods an entirely new sphere of values is born: moral values. Other ethicists speak almost exclusively of morally right and wrong acts, also therein frequently ignoring the fact that the consequences of human acts as such never suffice to constitute their moral character, and that it is not the positive balance of the consequences alone that makes them right or wrong.

But more importantly, those who teach ethics or write on it only from the angle of what is morally right and wrong, frequently keep ignoring the fact that the moral values themselves need to be investigated by ethics and that they are higher than the values of the consequences of human acts and even those of mere moral correctness: right ethical behavior, bereft of the proper moral motivation or of ethical knowledge, may be lacking in moral goodness.

And it is the moral nature of human acts, which is of primary concern for ethics and to which we now turn.

5) Moral Values themselves as the Core of the Objects of Ethics

What then is this incomparably higher good, which we call moral good, and which ethics should investigate? From Socrates on, many ethicists have recognized that moral values rank still higher than the great goods of life or health, and that it is better even to suffer the worst injustice than to commit it. Kant describes the ‘good will’, i.e., the will
as bearer of moral values, as "good without qualification". But what does this ‘goodness without qualification’ mean? What then are the marks of moral values and especially what are those distinctive characteristics by which moral values excel over all others? Only by a return to 'things themselves'—to the moral data themselves—can this question be answered adequately.

i. **Moral values are objectively good**

Moral goodness is first of all good without qualification inasmuch as this goodness does not depend on anyone’s subjective judgment about it. The moral value of the act of a judge who refuses to pronounce an unjust racist sentence during the Nazi times even though he knows that he will be murdered for his upright action, is not relative to, nor dependent on, anybody’s judgment. Moral goodness is not just good according to some person’s opinion. It is not just the purely intentional correlate of human imagination nor is the state of affairs that the decision of the judge had a high moral value, a purely intentional object of our acts of judging, as ethical subjectivism and relativism assume.

ii. **Intrinsic goodness (value) of moral values rather than their being merely agreeable to me or even only objectively good ‘for’ me**

'Good' in the context of moral goodness is also unqualifiedly or absolutely speaking good because it is not merely subjectively satisfying or relative to our inclinations in its importance. It is not even exclusively an objective good for us and not for others, such as a personal gift for us, that is not automatically a gift for others. When we say 'this just judge is good', we do not just mean that his justice is good for the judge, but that it is good in itself.

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13 Dietrich von Hildebrand and Rudolf Otto have clarified this sense of value far beyond Kant, and in criticizing his epistemology. See Dietrich von Hildebrand, “Die Idee der sittlichen Handlung”; the same author, Ethics, chs. 1-3, 17-18. See also Rudolf Otto, “Wert, Würde und Recht.”

14 A detailed theory of the category of the intrinsic positive importance (value) in contradistinction to the merely subjectively satisfying and to the objective good for persons was developed by Dietrich von Hildebrand. See his Ethics, ch. 1-7; 17-18. The absolute intrinsic value of moral goodness is also clearly stated by Kant as an essential feature of moral and of morally relevant values, namely of the person’s dignity which is of ‘absolute value’ and from which moral imperatives proceed:
iii. Moral values are necessarily linked to freedom

The properly personal human acts that can give rise to moral values have been distinguished clearly, by reference to their intentional rational nature and also, especially by Thomas Aquinas and by Karol Wojtyla\(^{15}\) by their freedom, from the unfree and often not even properly intentional human acts, such as sneezing, which lie outside the moral sphere. We are reminded of the classical distinction between the free *actus humanus* that can bear moral values, and the mere *actus hominis*, that cannot bear moral values, in Thomas Aquinas\(^{16}\). Moral acts are

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\text{"But suppose there were something the existence of which had itself absolute worth, something which, as an end in itself, could be a ground of definite laws. In it and only in it could lie the ground of a possible categorical imperative, i.e., of a practical law.}

\text{Now, I say, man and, in general, every rational being exists as an end in himself and not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will... All objects of inclinations have only a conditional worth, for if the inclinations and the needs founded on them did not exist, their object would be without worth..."}

\text{Kant, Grundlegung zu einer Metaphysik der Sitten, BA 64, 65. See also Kant, CP 61, 62.}

\text{See also Karol Wojtyla, *The Acting Person* (Boston: Reidel, 1979); cf. also the corrected text, authorized by the author (unpublished), (official copy), Library of the International Academy of Philosophy in the Principality Liechtenstein, Schibbogga 7 B-C, Benders, Liechtenstein.}

\text{Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Prima Secundae, Qu 1, a. 1, co, 1-15: “respondeo dicendum quod actionum quae ab homine aguntur, illae solae proprae dicuntur humanae, quae sunt proprie hominis inquantum est homo. differt autem homo ab aliis irrationalibus creaturis in hoc, quod est suorum actuum dominus. unde illae solae actiones vocantur proprae humanae, quarum homo est dominus. est autem homo dominus suorum actuum per rationem et voluntatem, unde et liberum arbitrium esse dicitur facultas voluntatis et rationis. illae ergo actiones proprae humanae dicuntur, quae ex voluntate deliberata procedunt. si quae autem aliae actiones homini conveniant, possunt dici quidem hominis actiones; sed non proprae humanae, cum non sint hominis inquantum est homo. manifestum est autem quod omnes actiones quae procedunt ab aliqua potentia, causantur ab ea secundum rationem sui obiecti. obiectum autem voluntatis est finis et bonum. unde oportet quod omnes actiones humanae propter finem sint.}

\text{See also Karol Wojtyla *The Acting Person*.}

\text{We may be surprised that Aquinas sounds in this text (no doubt unintentionally) as if only free actions and only acts done for the sake of an end were properly speaking human acts, so as if cognitions and affections and even free but purely interior responses and fundamental attitudes (without an 'exterior end' to accomplish) were to lie outside personal acts. At least for cognitions Thomas Aquinas would certainly admit their fully personal character and also calls them often acts (actus), he would not perhaps recognize the fully spiritual character of certain human affections. (See on this Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Ethics*, ch. 17; see also by the same author, *The Sacred Heart. An analysis of human and divine affectivity*, 2nd ed.: The Heart, ch. 2, "Spiritual and Non-Spiritual Forms of Human Affectivity.") We agree fully with his and Karol Wojtyla’s great insight that personal free acts differ sharply from all unfree happenings in man.} \]
personal and *free* acts and can only therefore be moral acts\(^\text{17}\). In a world in which personal acts would be determined by outside forces or by nature-moral values are *absolutely* impossible. Freedom means to have the power of self-determination, of self-governance, of self-possession. Free acts would not be if I did not will them: "*for if we will, it is; if we will not, it is not*...", says Augustine\(^\text{18}\). Thus freedom can determine the subject to act and command free activities: it is the king of action. Freedom, however, also involves another and more primary dimension: namely the capacity of saying a free ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to an object and above all to morally relevant and moral goods and evils.

Moral goods or evils do not only presuppose freedom (also any artistic creativity or exercise of a craft and any human playing of a game presuppose freedom) but they are in a certain sense the values of the free agent *qua* free subject. This is much more than freedom being a *condition* of moral acts. Freedom dwells in the heart of moral goodness and moral goodness lies in the heart of freedom. Moral goodness constitutes the most central value of personal freedom.

iv. Moral values presuppose a certain morally relevant object or matter (which can be grave or light)

Another essential mark of moral values is that they can arise only in response to certain goods or evils, which are *morally relevant*\(^\text{19}\).

At this point we have to return to the ambiguity of the notion of the good in classical and medieval ethics mentioned above. Thomas

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\(^{17}\) See on this distinction between the free *actus humanus* and what merely is happening in man also Josef Seifert, “Karol Cardinal Wojtyla (Pope John Paul II) as Philosopher and the Cracow/Lublin School of Philosophy.”


\(^{19}\) On a very profound level we may understand that most goods and values possess some (often hidden) *moral relevance*. Even a value that is not directly morally relevant such as the beauty of nature or of music can reveal itself to the deeper mind in its moral relevance, which demands our love of beauty, our rejection of ugliness, etc.
Aquinas, with the classical Aristotelian ethical tradition, regarded as the primary ethical imperative: *Do the good, avoid the evil!*, or: *The good ought to be done, evil avoided*\(^{20}\). This formulation of the most basic ethical imperative, notwithstanding its undoubted merits, is an insufficiently clear formulation of the basic ethical imperative and object of ethics for three reasons:

a) In the first place, this imperative only refers to the sphere of actions, to *doing* the good and *avoiding doing evil*, and can only with difficulty be applied to the spheres of purely inner morally good or evil responses (such as love or hatred), in which nothing is ‘done’. But also these purely inner acts, such as repentance or respect of other persons, can be appropriate value responses to morally relevant goods, such as other persons, or inappropriate to their objects. The same is true of desiring the good, which is not doing it, or of general moral attitudes (such as the virtue of justice or mercy), of morally good intellectual acts (such as consenting to the truth, loving the truth, etc), and of the ultimate source of moral life, which might be described as the will to submit to the truth in all those free acts which we are obliged or called to perform, or as *the general will to be morally good*\(^{21}\). But none of these goods are properly speaking a *doing* the good.

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\(^{20}\) See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I, q. 79, co: “Now the first speculative principles bestowed on us by nature do not belong to a special power, but to a special habit, which is called ‘the understanding of principles’, as the Philosopher explains (Ethic. vi, 6). Wherefore the first practical principles, bestowed on us by nature, do not belong to a special power, but to a special natural habit, which we call ‘synderesis’. Whence ‘synderesis’ is said to incite to good, and to murmur at evil, inasmuch as through first principles we proceed to discover, and judge of what we have discovered. It is therefore clear that ‘synderesis’ is not a power, but a natural habit.”

b) Secondly, the mentioned imperative: "the good ought to be done", refers primarily to the morally relevant good that ought to be realized through the morally good action rather than to its moral value itself. It can at least easily be interpreted as referring to those goods and values on the object-side of moral human actions which we ought to realize (for example saving a human life), rather than to the moral goodness itself. Even if both of these kinds of values can be meant in the imperative that the good ought to be done, evil avoided, they are entirely different. These two entirely different kinds of values, which ethics discusses, ought at least to be distinguished, and only one of them coincides with the moral qualities of human acts.

c) Thirdly, the cited formulation of the most basic moral imperative is not sufficiently restricted to refer to a moral imperative (that alone is relevant for ethics). For it uses such a broad notion of the good that it could also designate extramoral imperatives and goods such as playing a game of chess well, making a car elegant, etc.

If, and only if, both the term 'doing' used here encompasses all kinds of free acts including intellectual and affective acts that can be deeply formed by freedom, not only actions and doings, and if the meaning of 'the good' is understood correctly here in the more restricted sense in which it only refers to the morally relevant goods and above all to moral goodness itself (that distinguishes morally good acts from the many other acts which to perform is good, but not morally good), the above imperative is a correct formulation of the most basic and most universal objective moral imperative which we can recognize and which informs human conscience (synderesis).

If the most basic imperative formulated by Aquinas is correctly understood, it constitutes indeed a true statement: Because we morally speaking ought to realize the good, we ought no doubt to realize both of the two quite different kinds of values we just have distinguished: (a) Certainly, we ought to realize, or to respond properly to, goods such as the life or health of persons which are not morally good but which to respect or to realize is our moral duty. Goods such as human life are not only good things endowed with some objective value as that of a

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22 Also affective responses such as repentance can be morally good if properly sanctioned by the will. See on this the great discovery of "kooperative freedom" in Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 2nd edn (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1978), ch. 25.
brilliant scientific work or a chess game; they are also morally relevant goods. Whether or not we are morally good depends on whether or not we respond properly to those morally relevant goods such as life or health or well-being of our neighbors.

Nevertheless, nobody is morally good because he lives or is healthy – and yet, moral values of our acts appear ‘on the back of’ the genuine commitment to these morally relevant goods, such as human life, health, public safety, political freedom. Though none of these goods is morally good, yet these goods are morally highly relevant in two of the three possible senses of this term: (1) They do not lack, as countless morally non-relevant goods, such as good chess games or the life of a leaf of an acorn tree, do, any important relationship to morality, and therefore are called morally relevant in contrast to everything that is not morally relevant. (2) They are also morally relevant in a second sense, that is: they are only morally relevant and not themselves morally good.

We must overcome the ambiguity of a notion of the good as object of ethics that not only relates, but confuses, these two meanings of the

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24 See Max Scheler, Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values, transl. Manfred S. Frings and Roger L. Funk (Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1973), p. 27: “But Kant is correct in one point. It is in essence impossible for the value-contents of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ themselves to be the contents of a realizing act (‘willing’). For instance, he who does not want to do good to his fellow man –in such a way that he becomes concerned about the realization of his fellow man’s weal– but who merely seizes the opportunity ‘to be good’ or ‘to do good’ in this act, neither is good nor does ‘good’; he is truly an example of a pharisee who wishes only to appear ‘good’ to himself. The value ‘good’... is located, so to speak, on the back of this act, and this by way of essential necessity; it can therefore never be intended in this act.”

For a critique of Scheler’s thesis that moral values can never be directly intended see Josef Seifert, ¿Qué es y qué motiva una acción moral?, presentación de Alfonso López Quintás, trad. de y ensayo introductorio de Mariano Crespo (Madrid: Centro Universitario Francisco de Vitoria, 1995).

25 (3) Through the second of these senses, the morally relevant is contrasted with the morally good, whereas there is another sense of ‘moral relevance’ which also includes moral values. There is indeed a third purely functional sense of ‘morally relevant’ that simply refers to every value and good on the object-side of moral acts, from which moral calls or obligations issue. And in this sense also what is morally good itself is eo ipso also morally relevant, both when it obliges us to respect it in our own acts and when we are obliged to respect or to further moral values in other persons, e.g., by not corrupting or seducing them, or by giving them a positive moral education. See Dietrich von Hildebrand, Moralia. Nachgelassenes Werk. Gesammelte Werke Band 5, (Regensburg: Josef Habbel, 1980).
good. Notwithstanding their close relationship, we should not exclusively be directed towards realizing or saving morally relevant goods, such as human life, but also the completely different moral values. This is already apparent from the fact that we could also serve the realization of morally relevant goods such as human lives for egotistical reasons which in no way make our acts morally good; for example, a physician could save a baby’s life solely for financial gain (and perhaps kill on the same day another one for the same reason). But we should not only strive to serve the goods of life and other morally relevant goods for the right reasons, that is because they possess high value and because these oblige us to respect or to realize them. We should also intend to realize moral values such as justice, kindness, love, and do so, as Anselm says, propter rectitudinem voluntatis ipsam, for the sake of the inner rightness of our will itself.

We should even realize moral values primarily for their own sakes and for the reason of their intrinsic ultimate value (‘rectitude’), which does not lie in something external to the morally good act itself, for example in some consequences of human actions, but in the personal act and its subject.

26 See Anselm von Canterbury, De veritate, cap. 12, “De iustitiae definitione” (S. Anselmi Opera Omnia, vol. 1, p. 194): “D. Iustus namque cum vult quod debet, servat voluntatis rectitudinem non propter aliud, inquantum iustus dicendus est, quam propter ipsam rectitudinem. Qui autem non nisi coactus aut extranea mercede conductus vult quod debet: si servare dicendus est rectitudinem, non eam servat propter ipsam sed propter aliud. M. Voluntas ergo illa iusta est, que sui rectitudinem servat propter ipsam rectitudinem.”

See also the following text from Anselm von Canterbury, De libertate arbitrii, cap. 3 (Anselm, ibid., vol. 1, p. 212):

“M. Bene ad interrogata respondisti; sed adhuc opus est ut consideremus, propter quid illam rectitudinem servare deberat rationalis natura: an propter ipsam rectitudinem, an propter aliud.

D. Si non illa libertas data illi naturae ut voluntatis rectitudinem propter ipsam servaret rectitudinem, non valeret ad iustitiam; quoniam constat iustitiam esse rectitudinem voluntatis propter se servatam. Sed ad iustitiam prodesse arbitrii libertatem cedimus. Quare indubitanter asserendum est rationalem naturam non eam accepisse nisi ad servandam rectitudinem voluntatis propter ipsam rectitudinem. M. Ergo quoniam omnis libertas est potestas, illa libertas arbitrii est potestas servandi rectitudinem voluntatis propter ipsam rectitudinem. D. Non potest aliud esse. M. Iam ergo clarum est liberum arbitrium non esse aliud quam arbitrium potens servare rectitudinem voluntatis propter ipsam rectitudinem.”

27 This does not exclude that the religious person, or the person who holds for philosophical reasons that God exists (think of the Stoic philosopher Epictetus’ Diatribes and the hymns to God contained in this work, or of the purely philosophical arguments for the existence of God, even of a personal God), is
In our response to the many goods that are clearly not morally relevant—such as the smooth surface of a new street, fine and tasteful Persian rugs, good chess-games, or even a brilliant intellect, etc.—moral values do not arise.

What are the morally relevant goods and evils?

Though none of these goods is morally good, yet to give an adequate value response to them makes a person morally good. Persons, and many concrete realities in persons (such as pain, pleasure, knowledge, education, moral and religious acts), and to some extent also lower creatures, especially animals (to torture animals is morally wrong), truth, and other goods are morally relevant. Also the objective goods for persons, rights, freely entered bonds through promises and contracts, etc., the metaphysical condition and limitation of man, which excludes certain rights, etc., possess moral relevance. Though none of these goods is morally good, yet to give an adequate value response to them makes a person morally good. Persons, and many concrete realities in persons (such as pain, pleasure, knowledge, education, moral and religious acts in them), and to some extent also lower creatures, especially animals (to torture animals is morally wrong), truth, and other goods are morally relevant. Also the objective goods for persons, rights, freely entered bonds through promises and contracts, etc., the metaphysical condition and limitation of man, which excludes certain rights, etc., possess moral relevance.

In order to understand the significance of morally relevant data for moral good or evil, we also have to understand their exact role. They issue moral calls and obligations to us, whereas all other values address only a far more general and far less absolute call for an adequate response to us. The call to appreciate the masterpiece Don Quixote does not have the unique weight and seriousness of the moral call and above all of the moral obligation.

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28 Cf. Dietrich von Hildebrand, Ethics, ch. 19; Moralia.
29 Cf. Dietrich von Hildebrand, Ethics, ch. 19; Moralia.
Certainly, also the beauty in nature and art calls for an adequate response of joy or admiration; but if we fail to give the appropriate value response to these values, there is no *moral* disharmony in the discrepancy between the call to give an appropriate (due) value response found also here and the value on the object-side.

Moral values and disvalues arise ‘on the back’ of a *due* response to morally relevant goods; moral disvalues proceed from an *inappropriate* response to morally relevant goods.

Also for this reason, that not all values are morally relevant, the assertion: *Bonum est faciendum* is not clear enough as formulation of the fundamental moral norm or imperative. Many goods do not have the necessary link to morality that is their *moral relevance*. Therefore the general oughtness by which we ought to realize *any value*, must be sharply distinguished from the *moral ought* that issues only from morally relevant goods\(^{30}\). For this reason, we can also call the ethical principle of Moore and of ‘utilitarianists’: “to aspire to the greatest good (happiness) for the greatest number”, or to the greatest sum-total of value\(^{31}\), too indeterminate and therefore too bare of content, to delineate the specific essence of morality from extramoral and morally irrelevant spheres of values and goods.

Some morally relevant goods (such as the human person, or a large sum of money stolen from a person), and certain types of actions directed against them (such as taking human life, cruelly inflicting human suffering, etc.) constitute a serious (grave) matter; others a less serious (light) matter (such as cruelly killing a mouse through chemicals or even taking a small risk to human lives in inattentively driving a car). Correspondingly, moral values or disvalues are grave or light transgressions in relationship to the nature of a given act, and in dependence on the degree of moral relevance of its object, which is one important factor, although not the only one, which accounts for the gravity of a moral evil or the greatness of a moral virtue. Therefore, an action such as small theft of 5 Dollars or of inflicting small pains on an animal, is incomparably less immoral than taking an innocent human life or inflicting terribly cruel pains on a human being.

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\(^{30}\) See Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Moralia*, where this distinction and its forms and roots are analyzed.

\(^{31}\) This is the thesis of the “ideal value utilitarianism” of G.E. Moore.
v. Moral values imply a new type of ought which elucidates the ‘absolute sense’ in which they are good

Also an entirely new kind of *oughtness* is linked to moral values only. All goods and bearers of value of which we can say that it is good that they are, ought to exist in a wider and purely objective sense of the term. In another sense of the word ‘ought’ persons ought to realize, and to respond to, all kinds of values in the arts or in the sports, etc. In an entirely new, more solemn and serious way, however, we *ought to do what is morally speaking good*. Only here we encounter that unconditioned sense of oughtness which Kant believed to capture by the logical category of the ‘categorical imperative’.

This new moral ought, however, cannot be reduced to a ‘categorical imperative’ for at least two reasons: (1) In the first place because there are supererogatory and meritorious morally good acts which are not demanded ‘categorically’ (but rather in the form: ‘if you want to be perfect, sell your possessions and commit yourself entirely to a higher cause’, or: ‘if you want to realize heroic moral virtue, give your own life for that of others’). Some of these moral invitations (which address, logically and morally speaking, ‘hypothetical imperatives’ to us) can allow for the most sublime moral acts such as Maximilian Kolbe’s freely giving his life and taking upon himself a most cruel death in the stead of a family father condemned by the Nazis to die in a hunger bunker. If the Nazi officer had obeyed the *absolute and categorical moral obligation* addressed to him by the same good of the life of the family father *not to kill him unjustly*, his act would have been morally good but not especially meritorious or more sublime than Kolbe’s act. Or think of the Jewish physician and educator Janusz Korczak, who freely followed the children entrusted to him to the concentration Camp and died with them there; this is an extremely sublime moral act although there was no categorical obligation to act in this way. (2) Secondly, the difference between a categorical and a hypothetical imperative is a purely logical difference, not an ethical one. In fact, even a blatantly unjust command can take the logical form of a categorical imperative. The Mafia Boss can command his underlings: “Go and kill Mr. A.! No conditions and no ‘ifs’!” This is logically speaking a categorical imperative but an immoral one.

Also for this second reason, the unique weight and nature of the ethical demand and the unconditional call to pay heed to morally obligatory moral values is a specifically moral datum that is irreducible to the logical form of the categorical imperative.
This moral ought is not identical with the mere call found in each value (for example in a beautiful landscape) for an adequate response. It is a much more serious and different kind of moral ought addressed to our freedom.

At the source of this ought addressed to acting persons we find, with morally relevant values, also another metaphysical sense of ought: as that which absolutely speaking should be. This purely axiological 'oughtness', however, is radically distinct from the moral ought that addresses itself to a subject and calls on a free person; therefore the moral ought, because it addresses itself to acting persons, is also described as 'imperative'. The purely metaphysical oughtness is no imperative but in a sense is the foundation of imperatives. We are called to realize what (in itself) ought to be.

A moral call or imperative in its qualitatively new and higher weight can address itself to a person in two fundamentally different ways, only the first of which can be called in a specifically moral sense 'categorical', namely morally speaking absolute:

1) The moral call can take the form of a moral obligation. To disobey the moral obligation is evil and must absolutely not be done in the wholly new moral sense of oughtness.

This new kind of moral oughtness and its absoluteness throw light on the sublime nature of moral values and on a new dimension of the unrestricted sense in which they and the good will as their source are good: such a categorical obligation can only be linked to a sphere of values which is good in a profoundly 'unrestricted sense'.

Moral obligations can again be of different kinds: a) they can address themselves to any person and demand an action or omission that is required under all circumstances (in all situations) and from all subjects; or b) they can address themselves only to a certain group of persons or solely arise under special circumstances; this second group of moral obligations can also be suppressed by higher ones.

2) Next to such a metaphysical sense of 'oughtness' and strict moral obligations, however, we find in the moral sphere also another kind of call: namely 'moral invitations' distinct from moral 'obligations'. Kant's position that turns all moral calls into categorical imperatives is reductionist and omits the sphere of meritorious but 'optional' or 'heroic' moral acts. Take Father Maximilian Kolbe's action which is of extremely high moral value but not a response
to an obligation: or think of the bestowing of a good that is not owed to us, the generosity of a gift, the self-sacrifice of love. All these are not obligatory but supererogatory acts but of a sublime moral value.  

Nevertheless, in all moral values lives a unique and irreducible type of oughtness which elucidates the truth that can be regarded as a chief content of Plato’s and Kant’s insights, through which Plato and Kant contribute to the paideia of medical professionals by elucidating the fact that “moral goodness alone is ‘good without qualifications’”.

vi. Moral goodness expresses in an essentially new and higher sense the idea of value as such (good in a new and more proper sense to which extramoral senses of ‘goodness’ are merely analogous)

In virtue of all these characteristics, moral values are values in a higher sense, which express more purely the idea of value and goodness than others: a good man is precisely a morally good man, as Aquinas notes, and ‘goodness’ has a higher and more pure ring here.


Here, it is worth noting, with Thomas Aquinas, that while a human person is a being primarily because she is a substance, she is not good absolutely speaking simply because she is a human being.

In contrast, the person is good only secundum quid in virtue of her being a substance, and good without qualification only in virtue of her acts.

This shows a certain reversal of the order characteristic of being as such. For while accidents possess being only secundum quid and someone is a man and a being (ens) absolutely speaking primarily because of his substantial being, in the case of goodness a man is called good primarily in view of accidents and acts, not for being substantially speaking human, as Thomas observed. See Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, in: *Opera Omnia* (ut sunt in indice thomistico additis 61 scriptis ex aliis medii aevi aevi auctoribus), 7 Bde, ed. Roberto Busa S. J. (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 1980), vol. III, pp. 1-186, Q. 21, a. 5, co: “Ad cuius evidentiam sciendum est quod, ut ex dictis patet, sicut multiplicatur esse per substantiale et accidentale, sic etiam et bonitas multiplicatur; hoc tamen inter utrumque differt, quod aliquid dicitur esse ens absolute propter suum esse substantiale, sed propter esse accidentale non dicitur esse absolute: unde cum generatio sit motus ad esse; cum aliquis accipit esse substantiale, dicitur generari simpliciter; cum vero accipit esse accidentale, dicitur generari secundum quid. Et similiter est de corruptione, per quam esse amittitur.
vii. The unity of moral values

Another particularly striking feature of moral goodness is the unity of the sphere of moral values and virtues; this unity of the moral sphere has at least four meanings\(^{34}\).

\(a\) ‘One moral value’: moral goodness

There is one general moral value (moral goodness) of which all other moral values are subspecies; this kind of unity is not so clearly present in aesthetics, where for example the comic, the grotesque, or the ‘elegant’ are not subdivisions of beauty\(^{35}\).

\(b\) ‘No division of labor’ in the moral life

We cannot be specialists for some moral values, neglecting others\(^{36}\). All moral values are required from each\(^{37}\).

\(c\) ‘Existential moral unity’

We can also refer to an existential and inner moral unity in the sense that moral efforts in one area strengthen likewise the moral life in others. Also this is not found in aesthetic values.

De bono autem est e converso. Nam secundum substantialem bonitatem dicitur aliquid bonum secundum quid; secundum vero accidentalem dicitur aliquid bonum simpliciter.

Unde hominem in iustum non dicimus bonum simpliciter, sed secundum quid, in quantum est homo; hominem vero iustum dicimus simpliciter bonum.”

See also Thomas Aquinas, _Quaestiones Disputatae de malo_, Q. 1, a. 2, co:

“Sic  ergo licet homo secundum hoc ipsum quod est homo, sit quoddam bonum, non tamen ex hoc ipso est bonus homo, sed id quod facit bonum unumquodque est proprie virtus eius. Virtus enim est quae bonum facit habentem, secundum philosophum in II ethic.”

Similarly in _Quaestiones Disputatae de Virtutibus_, Q. 1, a. 7, Ra 2:

“unde solus ille dicitur esse bonus homo simpliciter qui habet bonam voluntatem.”

\(^{34}\) See Plato, _Meno_ 71 e ff.


\(^{36}\) On all of these traits of moral values cf. Dietrich von Hildebrand, _Ethics_, ch. 15.

\(^{37}\) Kant sees this in some of his remarks on the categorical imperative. See Immanuel Kant, _Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten_, in: Kants Werke, Akademie-Textausgabe (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1968), Bd. IV, 421 ff. See also my book on _Was ist und was motiviert eine sittliche Handlung?_ On the universality of the object of a moral act.
The unity of the 'root' of all moral goodness: the 'oneness of virtue'

All goodness in persons seems to come from one fundamental root, from one fundamental attitude. (There is one virtue only, of which the others are parts, as Socrates says in Plato's *Meno*.) Yet there are many spheres of acts in the person that are bearers of moral values.

viii. Moral values are dependent on the knowledge of morally relevant and of moral goods and evils

Moral values and disvalues necessarily presuppose the person because they also presuppose necessarily some knowledge of good and of evil, both of moral good and evil and of morally relevant goods and evils. While knowledge of the good does not necessitate the good will and while neither virtue can be reduced to knowledge nor vice to ignorance (as Socrates believed), nevertheless Socrates saw correctly that moral good and evil is *absolutely impossible without knowledge* and can already for this reason not exist in a plant or an animal deprived of the knowledge of the good. No unconscious and irrational (non-understanding) creature can be (come) morally good and bad. Moral values and disvalues presuppose, in their origin, even *actual rational consciousness and knowledge* (though the person remains good or evil superactually and also in a state of unconsciousness). Sleep and unconsciousness do not cancel the morally good or evil in and of a person, but in a state of pre-rational consciousness and during states of unconsciousness persons cannot perform acts that *make* them morally good or evil. Moral values cannot come to exist in a radically unconscious person, even if they *remain in such a person after she fell unconscious* (if she once had been conscious). The person who is unconscious from birth on, however, can never *actually* bear moral values but only potentially—in virtue of her essence as person—*remain capable of possessing them*, and possess them *potentially*. Their *actual possession*, however, demands the *actual possession of rational consciousness at some time during the given person's life*.

For being the subject of a moral call or obligation, the truth *bonum est faciendum*, as well as the morally relevant object of moral oughts, but likewise the ought and the moral value themselves which pertain to one's own acts, must be understood. The same is true of moral evil. Only persons have this degree and rationality of consciousness and knowledge, which is a condition for the arising of moral goodness or evil.
To consider the high value of morally good acts and how consciousness and rational knowledge are presupposed for their realization is particularly important for medical ethics. It provides one chief reason why the high good of rational conscious life must be served by physicians and why any prolonged or terminal privation of a person of her conscious life for insufficient reasons is immoral.

ix. Moral values involve responsibility

From their link to freedom and knowledge in relationship to the moral relevance of the goods that are the objects of moral acts follows also the ‘responsibility’ that characterizes the domain of moral values and disvalues. Responsibility presupposes at least three marks of morality:

a) The extraordinary ‘weight’ of morally relevant objects and of morality. These ‘matter’ in a unique and superior sense.

b) Also knowledge is required for responsibility (acting unknowingly is a form of the ‘involuntary’ action)\(^\text{38}\).

c) Freedom is likewise necessarily presupposed for responsibility.

Responsibility is not just the combination of these elements, however. It is a being accountable for one’s acts and even for one’s being good or evil, a having to answer for them; answer to whom? It seems evident that this question cannot be sufficiently answered by reference to human individuals and societies.

x. Moral conscience

Moral conscience is another unique phenomenon inside morality and closely related to responsibility. Conscience is not just ethical knowledge, which can refer not only to ourselves but also and equally to other persons and to general norms as well, whereas these are not related to our conscience in the strict sense: Only on our own acts and our own being conscience speaks. Conscience is therefore certainly not just the organ of ethical cognition, or at least this is quite another meaning of the term ‘conscience.’ The phenomenon of moral conscience is exclusively and necessarily related to the moral sphere and to our own person alone. It is thoroughly imbued with the essence and atmosphere of moral life, and our

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\(^{38}\) This has been analyzed beautifully and ‘very phenomenologically’ by Aristotle in the 3rd Book of *Nichomachean Ethics*. 
own moral life. The voice of conscience partakes in the seriousness of the moral ought itself, but as it addresses itself to me. Besides its relation to the moral ought itself, and to me quite personally, moral conscience has the character of a voice that lives in us but comes from somewhere ‘above us’.

Socrates even sees in the essential connection between immoral acts and this urphenomenon of moral conscience—a solemn voice that warns us solely against moral evil, never against pain or death—a special proof for his ethical insight that injustice is a greater evil than death. Moral conscience can speak in three different ways to us: besides warning us not to do morally evil deeds which we intend to do, it can also torment us after we committed morally evil acts or compel us to do what we are obliged to do, when we hesitate to do it.
Moral values deserve praise or blame in a new sense

With Cicero we can say that all praise and blame presuppose freedom and moral values or disvalues. While also political or other merits in sports etc., which presuppose human freedom, may deserve praise or blame in some sense, only properly moral values and disvalues fully and in an entirely new and original sense deserve praise and blame.

Also guilt and merit, reward and punishment are essentially related to moral good and evil, and, in an ultimate sense, to it alone - Happiness and unhappiness in their relation to good and evil

From morally good acts also springs a merit of the person who performs them, and from morally evil ones guilt, a special spot and stain on, or over, the perpetrator of morally evil acts: by performing evil acts, we become guilty; by performing good acts, we gain some merit and become deserving of some reward. There is also an ‘inner’ consequence of happiness and unhappiness resulting from good and evil acts that is often identified with reward and punishment. But these two things are not identical. Just consider the extreme limitation of that actual happiness which follows inevitably from performing morally good acts and which even the just man who is cruelly tortured will experience. Or consider that unhappiness which inevitably follows from perpetrating evil acts and which even the evil man who raves in mad joy in his evil deeds, will deep down in his soul experience. But certainly this happiness of the heroic martyr for the good cause is not the same as the happiness ‘he deserves’ as reward, nor is the hidden restlessness and unhappiness of the evildoer who delights in his bad deeds the punishment he objectively deserves.41

Rather, this relationship of ‘deserving’ of reward or punishment is far deeper and the just reward and punishment can only be bestowed by a person who in Himself embodies moral goodness and fully knows and weighs our moral good and evil. The relation between morally good and morally evil acts to reward and punishment, indicated in moral

41 This does not prevent the truth of the partial punishment in this which Augustine expresses so beautifully: “Thou has ordained it so, and so it is: that any disordered (evil) spirit is a punishment unto himself,” Augustine, Conf. 1, 19: “iusseisti enim et sic est, ut poena sua sibi sit omnis inordinatus animus,” [CCL 27 p. 11/15] Corpus Augustinianum Gissense a C. Mayer editum].
conscience, also exceeds by far the type of reward and punishment situated on a merely objective legal order of acting against or according to the law and of being punished by the law.

This interesting phenomenon of reward for good deeds on behalf of the community, and of punishment for transgressions of the law is itself linked to morality, but only in a very external and loose way. It is as it were a mere image and shadow of the true and authentic relationship between moral good and evil and the punishment and reward they deserve.

xiii. Moral values are absolutely speaking good in that they never must be sacrificed for any other value, because they are a) incomparably higher and b) should absolutely and 'first' be sought for.

Another important sense of the unrestricted meaning of moral goodness is that moral evil, injustice, must never be committed, even when suffering and death threaten, as Socrates sees so clearly in Plato’s Crito. When thrown in on the same scale, it can never lose or have less weight than other considerations. Therefore we must never act unjustly – even not in order to avoid suffering injustice.

xiv. Moral goodness as a source of the value of the person as such.

Moral goodness is a source of the value of the person as such – and this in different senses:

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42 Plato, Crito, 49 a ff.: SOCRATES: And if we find that we should be acting unjustly, then we must not take into account either of death, or of any other evil that may be the consequence of remaining here, where we are, but only of acting unjustly... Ought we never to act unjustly voluntarily? Or may we act unjustly in some ways, and not in others? Is it the case, as we often agreed in former times, that it is never either good or honorable to act unjustly? Is not what we used to say most certainly the truth, whether the multitude agrees with us nor not? Is not acting unjustly evil and shameful in every case, whether we incur a heavier or lighter punishment in consequence?

If we ought never to act unjustly at all, ought we to repay injustice with injustice, as the multitude thinks we may? CRITO: Clearly not...

SOCRATES: Then we ought not to repay injustice with injustice or to do harm to any man, no matter what we might have suffered from him. And in conceding this, Crito, be careful that you do not concede more than you mean. For I know that only a few men hold, or ever will hold, this opinion. And so those who hold it and those who do not have no common ground of argument.
A) Only persons as opposed to impersonal beings can be morally good.

B) Only the person herself can be the primary bearer of moral values: personal acts can be morally good merely in an analogous sense. Although the person becomes morally good or evil only through her acts, i.e., by performing them, the person herself becomes good or evil.

C) Moral goodness makes the person as such good in a deeper way than intelligence of which also the person herself is the subject. But moral goodness makes a person good not only in certain respects, as if making her good only as actor or as philosopher, or as thinker. Interestingly enough, the belonging of moral goodness to the person qua person is even more true of moral goodness than of the inalienable ontological dignity and value of the person. For the ontological value, as Thomas says, makes a person good only 'secundum quid', not 'simpliciter'.43 This is also, we may submit, the reason why Plato calls moral goodness the proper good of the soul44.

xv. Moral values are also the absolute and highest good for the person

According to the different ways in which a person can participate in moral values45, these moral values can also become an objective good for the person.

a) The person can be the bearer of moral values, and in consequence of this they are high objective goods for her.

b) Moral values can also become the object of a person’s contemplation or frui, and in this respect mostly the moral values of other persons and the infinite moral holiness of God become an objective good for her;

c) Moral values can be participated in by bringing them into existence, by making them be. This is directly possible only within the moral agent himself. While many other values can be created or brought into being directly by a given person outside that person herself, this is impossible in the moral sphere. Here only the per-

43 Of course, also here we would have to differentiate: while it is true that each and every moral value belongs to the person as such and makes her good, not all moral values do so in the same way.

44 See Plato’s Gorgias and Politeia, X.

son of the agent herself can become the source through which moral values arise in her. Nevertheless, through education, spiritual direction, through example and in many other ways a human person can also contribute to the realization of moral goodness in others. And by becoming the cause of moral goodness in others whom she formed as model, parent, teacher, or physician and friend, she participates in a unique way in their moral values.

Plato in the *Gorgias* gives as main argument why it is better for *man* to suffer injustice than to commit it: that the moral value itself is higher and more beautiful than freedom from suffering, or life as such, and that the ugliness of moral evil is far greater than that of suffering injustice or dying a cruel death. *Because the doing injustice* is intrinsically a greater evil, uglier and more shameful in itself, it must also be a greater evil for the soul of man\(^46\).

xvi. Moral values are also goods “in the unrestricted sense” by being pure perfections

An important metaphysical characteristic of moral values we cannot dwell on here because it belongs more to a metaphysics of morality than to ethics: morally good qualities are ‘good without qualification’ also in the sense that moral values are ‘pure perfections’, i.e., that their possession is absolutely better than their non-possession because they are not intrinsically limited\(^47\), as Anselm of Canterbury\(^48\) and Duns Scotus saw\(^49\).

\(^{46}\) Plato thus uses the insight that moral goodness is a good *in itself* in an unrestricted sense as the *ground* of it being also the greatest good *for* the soul. He does not argue the other way around: from moral evil being the greatest objective evil *for man* (for example by being followed by punishment) to its also being the greatest evil *per se*. Plato’s is quite another argument than the one from moral values being a means to happiness and to the intellectual vision of God and only thereby (indirectly, as means) having a relation to our highest objective good. Even less is it the argument from punishment that will follow moral evil. In fact, Plato argues that the *unpunished crimes*, because in them the person of the evildoer has no connection to the beauty of justice at all, not even by being punished justly, are the *worst of all evils, not only in themselves, but also for man*.

\(^{47}\) Kant implies this clearly when he says that neither in this world *nor outside it* we find anything that could be called good unqualifiedly except a good will, and that means the good will as bearer of moral perfection. This can only be said if evidence of moral goodness as pure perfection is presupposed by Kant. For otherwise there could be a higher and more unqualified sense of ‘goodness’. That moral perfection is not essentially limited and its possession absolutely speaking better than its non-
xvii. Link of morality to religion and to God

Being pure perfections, moral values must possess their supreme embodiment in God: God must be justice itself, mercy itself, etc. But there are also many other relations between moral values and God. Socrates, in the Apology, relates the morally good act, inasmuch it obeys the moral ought, also to the 'obedience' to God (presence of God in moral ought):

"Men of Athens, I am devoted to you, and I love you; but I shall be obedient to the God more than to you, and as long as I am breathing and able to, I will not cease to look for wisdom, and to exhort you."

Possession does not apply to all moral perfections: it is not true of essentially human moral perfections such as modesty or correctness in one's profession, but it does apply to the good will as it underlies not only all moral actions but also all moral virtues and the fundamental morally good attitude. It also applies to many moral virtues such as justice or truthfulness. The innermost essence of moral goodness and its source in what Kant refers to in our text by the term 'good will' (even if he has a limited understanding of the good will by restricting it to the sphere of action [Handlung] are pure perfections). See on this notion Josef Seifert, "Essere persona come perfezione pura. Il beato Duns Scoto e una nuova metafisica personalistica".

Whose name and decisive contribution is not even mentioned in Leo Sweeney, S.J., Divine Infinity in Greek and Medieval Thought. If the book were called: Some Studies on Divine Infinity in Greek and Medieval Thought, a title that would suit the book better since it appears to be a collection of papers, one would have less reason to demand that the name of Anselm be mentioned. This is hard to comprehend given the fact that Anselm possibly made the most original and significant contribution towards the understanding of divine infinity by the discovery of the pure perfections. More sorely missing in Sweeney's book is the proper recognition of the metaphysics of pure perfections (perfections absolutely speaking) as the sole ground for a rational concept of divine infinity and the understanding that the objective reality of these pure perfections is necessarily required for this divine infinity itself to be reality.

Although Scotus is treated briefly by Sweeney, ibid., pp. 553-558, only extremely abstract notions of Scotus on infinity and some of his criticisms of Thomas Aquinas are mentioned and rejected. Scotus' most significant contribution towards understanding divine infinity, the critical unfolding of the characteristics of the pure perfections, is not even mentioned.


See also Josef Seifert, ¿Qué es y qué motiva una acción moral?, presentación de Alfonso López Qintás, trad. de y ensayo introductorio de Mariano Crespo (Madrid: Centro Universitario Francisco de Vitoria, 1995).
There is, furthermore, a unique and purely objective glorification of God through the morally good act as such.

Newman calls our attention to another dimension of this relationship: Morality and especially moral conscience are "the creative principle of religion" - not in a nihilistic Nietzschean sense but in the sense that in moral conscience there is a natural human consciousness linked to the religious sphere, an immediate awareness of God as the Holy one and as Lord and Judge over the moral good and evil.

xviii. The superiority of moral values over all others

In the light of its essential characteristics it becomes much clearer that and why moral values are higher than all extra-moral ones and that therefore the striving for the realization of moral perfection is far more important than the efforts dedicated to the realization of any extramoral and morally relevant goods, as Kant has seen very deeply:

"A good will is not good because of what it effects or accomplishes—... it is good... in itself. Considered in itself it is to be esteemed beyond comparison as far higher than anything it could ever bring about... Even if, by some special disfavour of destiny or by the niggardly endowment of stepmotherly nature, this will is entirely lacking in power to carry out its intentions; if by its utmost effort it still accomplishes nothing, and only good will is left (not, admittedly, as a mere wish, but as the straining of every means so far as they are in our control); even then it would still shine like a jewel for its own sake as something which has its full value in itself. Its usefulness or fruitlessness can neither add to, nor subtract from, this value."  

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53 Immanuel Kant, Groundwork, p. 62. With his thesis that only the will is a bearer of moral values, Kant does not do justice to the metaphysical relation between moral values and the person, for the person herself is the primary bearer of moral values, not acts. On the other hand, Kant also suggests a limitation of moral values to the will in the narrower sense, that is, to the will which intervenes through actions. This would, however, neglect the virtues of a person as independent areas of moral goodness (even the most profound area), as well as that other area of moral goodness which we find in the case of taking an internal free stand. This restriction of morality implicit in Kant's ethics has been overcome convincingly by Dietrich von Hildebrand. See his Die Idee der sittlichen Handlung, and Ethics, especially pp. 316 sq and pp. 342 sq. If, however, the word "will" is used in the same meaning as "freedom," then the sphere of morality reaches indeed only as far as the will.
2. NATURE AND METHOD OF ETHICS AS A RIGOROUS RATIONAL SCIENCE

Under philosophical or ethical 'method' we can understand three very different things.

A. Ethical method as the kind of knowledge appropriate to the objects of ethics

Under 'method,' we can intend first the knowledge in which an object is grasped. Some methods of investigation, for example purely formal logical arguments or deductions, may be applicable to all objects, while others must adapt to the specific nature of a given object and also to the kind and theme of knowledge aspired to (the formal object)\(^54\). Method in this second sense is then the specific knowledge employed in order to know a concrete kind of object. Each method must be adequate to its object; this is an old principle formulated by Aristotle\(^55\). Thus the method

\(^{54}\) Aristotle raises this question of such a distinction and seems clearly to accept such a distinction between two kinds of method: universal and particular ones. Aristotle, *De Anima* I, 1: “To attain any knowledge about the soul is one of the most difficult things in the world. As the form of question which here presents itself, viz. the question ‘What is it?’, recurs in other fields, it might be supposed that there was some single method of inquiry applicable to all objects whose essential nature we are endeavouring to ascertain (as there is for incidental properties the single method of demonstration); in that case what we should have to seek for would be this unique method. But if there is no such single and general method for solving the question of essence, our task becomes still more difficult; in the case of each different subject we shall have to determine the appropriate process of investigation. If to this there be a clear answer, e.g. that the process is demonstration or division, or some other known method, many difficulties and hesitations still beset us — with what facts shall we begin the inquiry? For the facts which form the starting-points in different subjects must be different, as e.g. in the case of numbers and surfaces.”

\(^{55}\) The clearest text to this effect in Aristotle is *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 2: “Our discussion will be adequate if it has as much clearness as the subject-matter admits of; for precision is not to be sought for alike in all discussions, any more than in all the products of the crafts.”

See also Aristotle, *Prior Analytics*, I, 31: “It is clear that it is neither possible to refute by this method, nor to deduce about an accident or property of a thing, nor about its genus, nor in cases in which it is unknown whether it is thus or thus, e.g. whether the diagonal is incommensurate or commensurate. For if he assumes that every length is either commensurate or incommensurate, and the diagonal is a length, he has deduced that the diagonal is either incommensurate or commensurate. But if he should assume that it is incommensurate, he will have assumed what he ought to have proved. He cannot then prove it; for this is his method, but proof is not possible by this method. (Let A stand for incommensurate or commensurate, B for length, C for diagonal). It is
of knowing colors would be seeing, the method of knowing mathematical objects intuition and proof, etc. Against this background, we can distinguish different more general and more specific methods of ethics:

a) **Rational intuitive knowledge as more general and as more specific method of ethics**

i. Intuition of necessary essences as a method of ethics and its justification

A first method of an ethics that captures its objects is a kind of intellectual vision or seeing called often, from Plato and Aristotle on, intuition or insight\(^{56}\), or also, by Husserl, categorical intuition (*kategoriale Anschauung*)\(^{57}\), sometimes also essential vision (*Wesenssschau*)\(^{58}\), a kind of knowledge that corresponds to highly intelligible, intrinsically necessary forms or essences and is therefore much rather an inner intellectual understanding than a mere seeing, though it is not less immediate than sense perception and for this reason is rightly compared so sight.

This is a kind of knowledge that corresponds only to highly intelligible, intrinsically necessary forms or essences and is therefore much rather an inner intellectual understanding than a mere seeing,
though it is not less immediate than sense perception and for this reason is rightly compared so sight. A careful investigation into different kinds of essences (merely accidental unities, meaningful but contingent morphic essences and absolutely necessary essences) provided and clarified the objective foundation and conditions of the applicability of this method.

This philosophical intuition, in performing an *eidetic reduction* (*epoché*), brackets both the concretely existing samples of the respective essences and their merely accidental traits, in order to study the pure essences of things. Correctly understood, it brackets in no way, as Husserl has believed, the absolute and mind-transcendent objectivity and inner necessity of such essences as those of moral values which are valid for our real and for any possible world. Rather, this knowledge gives itself clearly as a knowledge of the essences of *things in themselves* and not just of objects constituted by human subjectivity such as purely intentional objects or perspectives or aspects of things.

This immediate intuitive knowledge of the necessary and intelligible essences of things is also opposed to any form of reductionism and “nothing but method” which seeks to reduce logical laws to psychological laws, works of art to psychological experiences, values to feelings, justice to *ressentiment*, love to *libido*, etc.

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As any other sphere of knowledge, also ethics either rests on some immediate form of knowledge or is no knowledge at all. This is true of any empirical science as well, which rests on sense perceptions, the results of which cannot be obtained from arguments or inductive or deductive reasoning, but in an archetypical form of immediate contact with something: in seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, etc. Aristotle points out that as well any theoretical science such as mathematics, metaphysics, logic, etc. the foundations of which are not given in immediate sense perceptions presuppose an immediate knowledge that is prior to demonstration and more certain than they, because the conclusions of deductions can never reach higher certainty than their principles and premises. But there is a huge difference between sense perception and intellectual insight: sense perception is an important and foundational form of original experience but does not in itself possess fully the nature of knowledge (rather than having to be interpreted by some intellectual acts of knowing and judging), whereas intellectual immediate insight is an archetypical and fully rational form of knowledge itself. This immediate knowledge, and its result, Aristotle also notes, is founding of, prior to, true and more certain than all conclusions of demonstrations, because all proofs rest on such an immediate knowledge. To deny this would be absurd and only lead to

62 Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, translated by H. Tredennick and E.†S. Forster, Oxford Classical Library (London: William Heinemann Ltd./Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, vol. I 21996; vol. II 31976); Book I, 2: “What I now assert is that at all events we do know by demonstration. By demonstration I mean a syllogism productive of scientific knowledge, a syllogism, that is, the grasp of which is eo ipso such knowledge. Assuming then that my thesis as to the nature of scientific knowing is correct, the premisses of demonstrated knowledge must be true, primary, immediate, better known than and prior to the conclusion, which is further related to them as effect to cause. Unless these conditions are satisfied, the basic truths will not be ‘appropriate’ to the conclusion. Syllogism there may indeed be without these conditions, but such syllogism, not being productive of scientific knowledge, will not be demonstration. The premisses must be true: for that which is non-existent cannot be known—we cannot know, e.g. that the diagonal of a square is commensurate with its side. The premisses must be primary and indemonstrable;
circular demonstrations which would not prove anything. Thus all demonstrations, in ethics, as elsewhere, necessarily presuppose indemonstrable knowledge which cannot be less certain than what is demonstrated. Moreover, it is the originary form of scientific knowing and unfailingly and essentially true. Error never lies in it but solely in wrong generalizations or unfounded conclusions drawn from it. This conclusion of Aristotle fully applies to ethics.

otherwise they will require demonstration in order to be known, since to have knowledge, if it be not accidental knowledge, of things which are demonstrable, means precisely to have a demonstration of them. The premisses must be the causes of the conclusion, better known than it, and prior to it; its causes, since we possess scientific knowledge of a thing only when we know its cause; prior, in order to be causes; antecedently known, this antecedent knowledge being not our mere understanding of the meaning, but knowledge of the fact as well."

Ibid., I, 3: “Our own doctrine is that not all knowledge is demonstrative: on the contrary, knowledge of the immediate premisses is independent of demonstration. (The necessity of this is obvious; for since we must know the prior premisses from which the demonstration is drawn, and since the regress must end in immediate truths, those truths must be indemonstrable.) Such, then, is our doctrine, and in addition we maintain that besides scientific knowledge there is its originative source which enables us to recognize the definitions. Now demonstration must be based on premisses prior to and better known than the conclusion; and the same things cannot simultaneously be both prior and posterior to one another: so circular demonstration is clearly not possible in the unqualified sense of ‘demonstration’, but only possible if ‘demonstration’ be extended to include that other method of argument which rests on a distinction between truths prior to us and truths without qualification prior, i.e. the method by which induction produces knowledge. But if we accept this extension of its meaning, our definition of unqualified knowledge will prove faulty; for there seem to be two kinds of it. Perhaps, however, the second form of demonstration, that which proceeds from truths better known to us, is not demonstration in the unqualified sense of the term."

Ibid., I, 22: “An immediately obvious consequence of this is that demonstrations necessarily involve basic truths, and that the contention of some-referred to at the outset-that all truths are demonstrable is mistaken. For if there are basic truths, (a) not all truths are demonstrable, and (b) an infinite regress is impossible; since if either (a) or (b) were not a fact, it would mean that no interval was immediate and indivisible, but that all intervals were divisible. This is true because a conclusion is demonstrated by the interposition, not the apposition, of a fresh term. If such interposition could continue to infinity there might be an infinite number of terms between any two terms; but this is impossible if both the ascending and descending series of predication terminate; and of this fact, which before was shown dialectically, analytic proof has now been given.”

Ibid., II, 19: “Now of the thinking states by which we grasp truth, some are unfailingly true, others admit of error-opinion, for instance, and calculation, whereas scientific knowing and intuition are always true: further, no other kind of thought except intuition is more accurate than scientific knowledge, whereas primary premisses are more knowable than demonstrations, and all scientific knowledge is discursive. From these considerations it follows that there will be no scientific knowledge of the primary premisses, and since except intuition nothing
Rational and objective philosophical insight is very hard to acquire even though it has a kind of simplicity about it\textsuperscript{66}. This method requires, in its strict form, an object to which it is appropriate and which lends itself to such a method, such as the essence of moral values.

When we distinguished the different marks of moral values, we had to look at the necessary essence by which moral values are distinct from aesthetic and from morally relevant, non-moral values\textsuperscript{67}.

ii. Which kind of immediate knowledge does ethics require?

The kind of immediate knowledge ethics requires can include sense perception but certainly does not rest chiefly, or in as important a sense as chemistry, physics, zoology or medicine, on it; for neither the moral values themselves nor their bearers, the personal acts, can be seen, heard, touched, or in any other way be grasped through the senses, except for their physical expression in the human body. Only the purely external side of human actions and the physical side of the expression of moral acts and attitudes in the body are perceived through the senses; but even here our understanding of the expression of moral qualities in what we see or hear transcends the sense-data and sense perceptions as such. It grasps something of entirely invisible and spiritual nature.

The specifically ethical intuition is in the first place an immediate knowledge obtained through some form of intellectual intuition which can again be of different kinds and has different elements: ethical knowledge begins with our knowledge of other persons and of our own personal lives.


\textsuperscript{67} Certainly, a similar method applies to many other forms of cognition, for example to works of art, other persons, and even to some dimensions of the knowledge of forms and species-plans in nature.
All of us possess an inner experience of our own consciousness, knowledge, intentions, acts, and their objects, and we can pay heed to them and describe our different affective, intellectual, and volitional experiences and our different acts which are consciously lived by us from within.

But we also possess at the origin of our moral experience an experience of the inner life and acts of other persons, far more complicated to explain than the experience of our own conscious life because we have neither an immediate inner awareness nor a direct and immediate introspection into other persons’ conscious lives.

Our ethical knowledge is in no way reducible to the immediate intuitive forms of cognition of our own and other persons’ conscious acts. Rather, both our own and other persons’ acts have an intelligible general form and essence, which allows us to identify clearly the general moments of free acts, the indispensable elements of acts such as forgiveness or gratitude, the different relations between persons, etc. The general essences of these acts are not contingent and accidental but necessary and intelligible. Therefore our mind can comprehend here much rather than merely describing accidental individual experiences and mixtures of experiences: it can rise to a true and immediate knowledge of the pure essences of the mentioned data.

It is important to note here that Kant’s and Engelhardt’s restriction of ethical value intuitions to completely formal and content-less imperatives and principles is untenable and contradictory in itself (because even Kant uses the content-full personalistic formulation of the categorical imperative and Engelhardt presupposes the equally content-full values of freedom, tolerance, non-violence, peaceful dialogue, etc.). But we clearly gain also many intuitions in the specific content-full and non-formal values that are rooted in persons, animals, different acts and virtues of persons, etc.

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69 Materialien Werte.

Moreover, in many of these essences, especially those with which ethics is concerned, such as love or justice, we perceive a perfection hardly ever found in concrete individual experiences; therefore we can say that the justice, kindness, love, etc., which we encounter in ourselves and in other persons is quite imperfect.

Without justifying this type of knowledge of the essences of specifically personal acts and experiences, we can never ground ethics as a science. Take an empiricist's position that will recognize solely Basissätze (basic sentences) known through sense perception. It is clear that on such a basis only a non-cognitivist ethical standpoint is possible because the sentences the truth of which sense perception informs us of can at best found a theory of different patterns of bodily behavior but never found ethics as a science, granted that the evidence of the natures of personal acts cannot be seen, smelt, etc., but must be understood with some other intellectual power.

The best an ethics of this sort can reach will be a system like that of Mackie, according to which indeed ethics presupposes objective values but these are quaint and queer objects, because they are not given to the senses, and therefore entirely unknowable. A fine ethical perception, such as that of Mackie, coupled with a purely empiricist theory of ethical method, has to claim that our moral life rests on entirely irrational assumptions of something (of intrinsic values) that cannot be known because its existence can never be verified or falsified by sense perceptions.

But even in defending this non-cognitivist ethical standpoint, the purely positivist or empiricist ethics involves itself in insurmountable self-contradictions. For also the assumption of objective values which Mackie attributes to our ethical experience cannot be perceived by the senses; neither can its alleged non-cognizability be verified or falsified by sense-perceptions. Moreover, this position is contradictory also because any denial of non-sensory acts of cognition of data which cannot be verified or falsified through sense perceptions is contradictory because it itself presupposes what it denies. For example, Mackie asserts that in our moral experience we make truth claims for our judgments on objective values; but these (according to Mackie unfounded) truth-claims and their existence in our moral experience cannot be experienced by the senses but must be understood as something entirely immaterial. This ethics furthermore makes actual truth-claims for itself;

but neither these nor the presupposed actual truth of its propositions nor the validity of its logical underpinnings and implications and of the logical reasonings used by Mackie and the valid forms of them can ever be known by the senses. Thus the entire ethics of Mackie would have to be disqualified as queer or quaint or as meaningless utterances, as Carnap said, if there were not an immediate intellectual knowledge different from sense perception and in no way queer\textsuperscript{72}. Thus Mackie necessarily presupposes what he denies; and this is true for any attempt to negate undeniable truths which one inevitably reintroduces as soon as one denies them\textsuperscript{73}.

iii. Value-seeing (Wertsehen) as a method of ethics

But ethics as a rational science not only presupposes intelligible data not accessible through sense perception but only through a sort of intellectual intuition (an insight that we might also call ‘categorial intuition’) that is not less immediate than sense perception. This would not be specific to ethics because also logic, general ontology or mathematics as authentic sciences presuppose this\textsuperscript{74}.

Rather, ethics presupposes in addition an immediate knowledge of the essence of those things that are morally relevant and of their


importance, which gives rise to moral obligations or calls. Ethics requires a further method of an insight adapted to the different essence of those acts which are bearers of moral values, into the conditions of moral values in the subject and into their objects, etc.

While also deductive logical reasoning plays an indispensable role in ethics as a science, certainly the immediate intellectual grasp of these things which are urphenomena irreducible to others plays a key role. Therefore phenomenology as an unfolding of the self-given nature of these things is an indispensable methodological instrument of ethics as a science.

The intuitive ethical method of an intellectual seeing of values differs not only from sense-perception, with which it shares the immediacy but not the bluntness of simply ‘observing facts’, but also from an intuition into purely logical or formal-logical principles such as the principle of contradiction, which are as necessary and intelligible as the essence of moral values. But the Werte sehen (seeing of values), both concretely in our everyday experience and in an intellectually purer, more distinct, more precise way in philosophical ethics, differs from other intuitions because it is the form of grasping that unique urphenomenon which we call value (the good). And within the broader sphere of knowing values and the good, the seeing of uniquely moral urphenomena and moral values, which we have tried to identify briefly, differs in important ways from other sorts of immediate rational knowledge.

This method of ethical value-intuitions and insights into the essence of moral values is not some irrational feeling of values, which also Max Scheler or Pascal did not have in mind when they spoke of value-feeling (Wertfühlen), in order to indicate the type of immediate intuitive knowledge found in ethics. We should, however, not at all characterize this immediate knowledge of moral values and of their essences as feelings. For insights into moral values and into their essences are neither themselves an emotional experience (though deep emotions flow from the intuitive cognition and even more from the

75 Though Karol Wojtyla charges Max Scheler with an “emotionalization of consciousness”, Max Scheler certainly believed, like Pascal before him, that there is also an intentional cognitive feeling of values, similarly to the immediate feeling in the sphere of our senses. See Karol Wojtyla, “Über die Möglichkeit, eine christliche Ethik in Anlehnung an Max Scheler zu schaffen”, in: Karol Wojtyla/Johannes Paul II, Primat des Geistes. Philosophische Schriften (Stuttgart-Degerloch: Verlag Dr. Heinrich Seewald, 1980), pp. 35-326.
contemplation of values), nor is our knowledge of moral values a mere witnessing or testimonial deprived of rigorous rational evidence. Rather, it is a fully rational grasping of moral values, an insight into them that is not less rational than mathematical or logical intuitions, though different in kind. Also in ethical insights into moral values the human mind transcends all mere human subjectivity and grasps the objective essence of things which informs the intellect, for example, that committing injustice and realizing the moral disvalue of unjust acts not only differs from evils such as suffering injustice, but is a greater evil and an evil of an entirely different kind — given in its distinctness to our mind.

Ethics as a rigorous science does not only presuppose intuitive knowledge of essences of acts and values but these intuitions and their objects must also be systematically unfolded as we will see when discussing the second type of method in ethics.

As all intelligible essences, so also moral data require a careful systematic analysis and clear distinctions between their different intelligible marks and between them and other values and data.

iv. Rehabilitation of ‘speculative intuitive ethical knowledge’ in realist phenomenology

It would be wrong to believe that there is not a great differentiation of the mode and immediacy with which intelligible data are given to us. And some metaphysical and religious aspects of moral data (such as their connection to God) are not as conspicuously and clearly present to our intellect as the phenomenon of motion, of color, or even of the soul and of the will, or of human cognition. In ethical inquiry we encounter some more mysterious, indirectly given data, hinted at in moral conscience such as the omniscience and omnipotence of God which is required to be the ultimate judge that justice in response to morally good and evil persons calls for. A speculative metaphysical
phenomenology which also heeds more indirectly and mysteriously given data is one of the chief advances beyond Husserl made in the method (in the first sense that refers to the form of knowledge) of realist phenomenology.

v. The role of existential knowledge (that resists any epoché)

A proper ethical method, in the sense of the kind of knowledge that brings us into contact with objects, includes also those forms of cognition that give us access to esse (existence) as distinct from essence, and to the really existing world. The idea that philosophy can never be interested in the actual being, in the actus essendi, in the actual real being of the world, of the self, or of God, but is restricted to a world of pure essences or Platonic forms — is in my opinion a serious error not only of transcendental phenomenology but also of many parts of phenomenological objectivism.

To recognize in general terms the difference of existence from essence is only one first step towards phenomenological realism. Not only the question of what actual (real) existence as such means and is (what is that — to exist?), but likewise the concrete existence of my own being and of the being of other persons known through special forms of knowledge (often called empathy), of the human soul, of freedom and above all of God, are absolutely crucial objects of philosophical investigation and possess great relevance for ethics as well.

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79 On this point I am wholly in agreement with Étienne Gilson, when he chastises the “essentialism” of many philosophers and when he says that a great forgetfulness of being has occurred in philosophy, when it abstracted from, or showed disinterest, in this topic. In minimizing the role of essence, however, I believe Gilson goes against many other evidences and errs profoundly. See Étienne Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1952); God and Philosophy, 7. Aufl. (New Haven/London, 1970). See my Sein und Wesen (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1996), and “Essence and Existence. A New Foundation of Classical Metaphysics on the Basis of ‘Phenomenological Realism,’” and a Critical Investigation of “Existentialist Thomism,” Aletheia I (1977), pp. 17-157; I,2 (1977), pp. 371-459.
b) The method of deduction and of various logical reasonings in ethics

It is a common prejudice to believe that a phenomenological philosophical method cannot relate to mediate forms of knowledge and must only consider the immediately given. Not only do we have excellent examples of exploring the deductive methods of the application of formal logic in phenomenology. Rather, we can and must also apply—wherever needed, for example in the metaphysical arguments for the existence and immortality of the human soul, which belong to the anthropological foundations of ethics, or for God in the moral arguments for His existence—infERENCE, deduction, and other dialectical methods to lead us back to things themselves. Such dialectical methods, as they have been used already in Socrates, consist in various elements and are regarded by Socrates as conditions of reaching the immediate contemplative knowledge of essences (eides): There is:

(a) The dialogical element itself, the asking systematically questions and answering them (Socrates insists at times that we do both shortly but the decisive moment is not the length of the question and answer but its precision and its service to authentic knowledge). This element can hardly be called essential for philosophical knowledge because dialogue is not the only way to philosophize, but it is certainly a very useful tool and part of philosophical education.

(b) Quite different is the element of a logical and systematic structure of a philosophical train of thought and discourse.

It would be stubborn stupidity to negate all these methods where they are appropriate. Just keep in mind that they always presuppose and never can replace the methods of immediate intuition.

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80 See the masterwork of Alexander Pfänder (Mariano Crespo, Hg.), Logik, 4. Auflage, Bd. 10, (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Carl Winter, 2000).
81 I owe the recognition of the similarity between many methods of the Socratic-Platonic dialectics and the phenomenological method to a paper read by Khalia Haydara, MA, in a Common Seminar at the International Academy of Philosophy in the Principality of Liechtenstein.
82 See Plato, Gorgias, 449b.
83 See Plato, Phaedrus, 264c.
84 This was also seen by the skeptic philosopher Wolfgang Stegmüller. See on this Wolfgang Stegmüller, Metaphysik, Skepsis, Wissenschaft (München: Piper, 1970). See likewise my discussion of this in Erkenntnis objektiver Wahrheit. Die Transzendenz des Menschen in der Erkenntnis (Salzburg: A. Pustet, 1976), Nachwort.
B. Ethical methods as more concrete modes of proceeding in the process of knowing

We can secondly mean by method the more concrete modes of proceeding in the process of knowing something. Understood in this way, we could say that the method or knowing colors is not sufficiently described by the answer “seeing” but is a paying attention to all the neighboring colors as well as to the specific identity of the quality of the color we see, trying to identify, name, and distinguish many shades of each color, etc. Or the method of knowing music would not just be listening but keeping in mind the notes just heard, paying attention to all the different tones and the intervals contained in a harmony, becoming attuned to distinguish them in listening, paying attention to rhythm, speed, and to recognize its different kinds, etc. In an analogous way one could identify many elements of methodic procedure in ethics, for example:

a) Delving into different essential marks of a moral values.
b) Sharply distinguishing, and not confusing, some kinds of moral values with their general essence, such as Socrates shows in the *Euthyphro*, when the question arises what is the holy\(^{85}\). In making this distinction (and others as well) Socrates uses different methodological elements which Goldschmidt has well identified\(^{86}\):

i. Showing that a more general phenomenon must not be identified with another more concrete one, with which it becomes identified, because there are other examples of it (*et alia*)\(^{87}\).

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\(^{85}\) *Euthyphro*, d-e: “I did not bid you to tell me one or two of the many pious actions but that form itself that makes all the pious actions pious, for you agreed that all impious actions are impious and all pious actions pious through one form."


\(^{87}\) This way Socrates answers when the nature of beauty is wrongly identified with one kind of things which are beautiful. See Plato, *Greater Hippias*, 287e: “Listen Socrates, to tell the truth, ‘beautiful’ is a beautiful young girl.”
ii. One might be able to show that even its opposite has the same essence (form) with which one identified it (et oppositum)\textsuperscript{88}.

iii. One can show him that the chosen example has many imperfections and therefore is not justice itself, holiness itself, etc., but a very poor and imperfect image or sample of it (et idem non). "Compared to a god the wisest of men is seen to be a monkey\textsuperscript{89}" So, said Socrates: "If you put the class of girls together with the class of god, won't the same thing happen as happened when the class of pots was put with that of girls? Won't the most beautiful girl be seen to be foul?\textsuperscript{90}"

c) \textit{Distinguishing} closely related or similar data (for example distinguishing clearly morally relevant from morally non-relevant values, and moral values from morally relevant values).

d) The distinction of many data meant by the same term, for example of the term value\textsuperscript{91}.

e) Finding opposites to given data, such as contrasting moral goodness with moral evil, justice with injustice, etc\textsuperscript{92}.

f) There is also the method of dialectics. Dialectics also entails showing contradictions in opposed positions\textsuperscript{93}, and

\textsuperscript{88} In the \textit{Laches}, to the Socratic question what’s courage? Laches answers that courage consists in remaining at one’s post and in defending oneself against the enemies without running away. Based on some Homeric writings, Socrates tells Laches that the Scythians, honorable warriors, were fighting with their enemies precisely by not holding their place but in retreating. Thus also the opposite way of acting can be an expression of courage (See Plato, \textit{Laches}, 191a-b; see ibid., 190e). For a similar use of this argument see also Plato, \textit{Charmides}, 159b-c.

\textsuperscript{89} \textit{Heraclitus}, B82 Diels- Kranz.

\textsuperscript{90} \textit{Greater Hippias}, 289b.


\textsuperscript{92} All this would deserve Goethe’s term of a method that is appropriate to vision, \textit{eine dem Anschaun gemäße Methode}.

\textsuperscript{93} It would be stubborn stupidity to negate all these methods where they are appropriate. Just keep in mind that they always presuppose and never can replace the methods of immediate intuition. This was also seen by the skeptic philosopher Wolfgang Stegmüller. See on this Wolfgang Stegmüller, \textit{Metaphysik, Skepsis, Wissenschaft} (München: Piper, 1970). See likewise my discussion of this in \textit{Erkenntnis objektiver Wahrheit}. \textit{Die Transzendenz des Menschen in der Erkenntnis} (Salzburg: A. Pustet, 21976), Nachwort.
g) Showing that the opponent’s position itself presupposes the insights one seeks to defend.

h) A specially significant ethical method could be called “a realist transcendental method.” This method consists in demonstrations of the necessary presupposedness of certain data for all experience; showing in which ways even any negation of certain phenomena, such as value, moral value, freedom, etc. necessarily presupposes them\textsuperscript{94}.

C. Methods of ethics as tools of knowledge

Thirdly, we conceive the ethical method in the sense of the tools used in ethical knowledge itself, as well in the modes and elements of this knowing.

a) Here, for example, abstraction can be regarded, not as a type of knowledge, but as a means to obtain it, similar to \textit{epoché}\textsuperscript{95}.

b) Similarly, Logic as well as certain means of discourse (such as dialogue, short answers and questions, etc.) can be said to be the methodological tool and \textit{organon} of ethics as a science.

c) Also the use of “free variation” of all the elements that can be changed in a datum without changing its fundamental essence and identity, could be discussed here:

“Um ein Wesen vor uns zu haben, betrachten wir eine konkrete Erfahrung und lassen sie in Gedanken variieren. Wir stellen uns vor, dass alle Gesichtspunkte variiert werden; - was aber \textit{als das Invariante} aller Veränderungen \textit{übrig bleibt}, das ist das Wesen des besagten Phänomens.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1973)\textsuperscript{96}

d) Possibly also in this group of ethical methods falls the element Gabriel Marcel has called ‘negative experiment’: let us see what

\textsuperscript{94} See a good example of this in Hans-Eduard Hengstenberg, \textit{Grundlegung der Ethik} (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1969), Introduction and ch. 1.

\textsuperscript{95} The question whether and in which sense some bracketing or prescinding, some \textit{epoché}, is an element of the phenomenological method, has been briefly touched on above.

would remain of human experience if freedom did not exist or were no part of the world. How many things would then be senseless? Augustine used this method with respect to demonstrating the reality of human freedom by showing in how many basic elements of private and public human life it is necessarily presupposed. In this way, we could ask, as already Cicero, did: what all in human experience and relations would become meaningless if man were not free? Laws, commands, reproaches, exhortations, etc. would all be meaningless.

e) Another tool falling in this category would be “linguistic analysis.” If linguistic analysis is understood as all there is accessible to philosophy, then it negates philosophy proper and reduces ethics to a mere study of ethical language. In this case it is in deep conflict to the forms of authentic ethical knowing. But linguistic analysis is an excellent method of ethics in the third sense. It is a fine means to reach knowledge of things themselves. With Wittgenstein, we could identify the different ‘language games’, the different dictionary meanings of a term, or depth-grammar of language, but – against Wittgenstein’s pure linguistic analysis – we

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98 But it also can be understood as a limited means to get to know the essences of things themselves. And then it can be helpful if it is inserted in a critical philosophical context and if one does not stick to those parts of the essence of a thing that are referred to in the conceptual meanings of words. To treat the positive side first: often the different meanings of words refer to entirely different things and help us to see them; negatively, there are many more things in things (triangle) than in word-meanings; we have to without going beyond the meaning it would hardly be possible to recognize this adequately.


ought to refer all mere linguistic elements and meanings and roots of words in different languages back to the different data meant by them, which the philosopher needs to see. Only by such a return to things he can avoid and uncover real category mistakes\textsuperscript{101}.

Once ethics uses all these methods and rigorously serves itself of them, it can progress to the level or a real pure science of the moral life itself, of good and evil themselves.

To say this does in no way pretend that ethics does not require also many moral virtues and elements of κάθαρσις\textsuperscript{102}, without which ethical value knowledge would be impossible. But these do not prevent the rationality of ethics as a science; they are only moral conditions of attaining it, of reaching that pure and rigorous knowledge of many data and especially of the morally good and evil ethics calls for.