

A Virtue of Feminism or Rehabilitating Aristotle

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Abstract

Pride is a particularly difficult virtue and feminism is a particularly maligned approach to moral theorizing. Indeed, pride is often seen as the very antithesis of virtue while the backlash against feminist theory is widespread and well documented. The reasons for these difficulties are surely multifarious, though within this paper I will deal with those reasons only as a matter of secondary concern. Instead, the primary focus of this paper is to offer what I take to be a way of strengthening the arguments in favor of a Virtue conception of moral theory (as opposed Deontological and Teleological) by presenting a perspective that restores Pride to the ranks of the virtues. I shall show how the conception of Pride that I will advocate has its roots in Aristotle though it is supplanted by a conception of Humility in the intervening centuries. I will further show how that concept of Humility causes a Virtue Theory to be somewhat difficult to defend. Finally, I will argue that a feminist approach to the virtues makes accessible a variant of the Aristotelian conception of Pride and in the process, eliminates the difficulty that the concept of Humility as a virtue entails. I do not argue that feminism is the only approach which makes accessible this particular conception of pride nor that only feminist thinkers have advocated it, only (1) that in contemporary discourse, it is feminist thinkers who have both raised the issue and offered the reformulated concept of pride as an alternative to the more dominant contemporary approach which lists humility among the virtues and pride among the vices and (2) that this reformulated concept of pride makes defense of at Virtue Theory more plausible than many of the contemporary attempts which included humility as a virtue and pride as a vice.

Introduction

Pride is a particularly difficult virtue and feminism is a particularly maligned approach to moral theorizing. Indeed, pride is often seen as the very antithesis of virtue while the backlash against feminist theory is widespread and well documented.ⁱ The reasons for these difficulties are surely multifarious, though within this paper I will deal with those reasons only as a matter of secondary concern. Instead, the primary focus of this paper is to offer what I take to be a way of strengthening the arguments in favor of a Virtue conception of moral theory (as opposed Deontological and Teleologicalⁱⁱ) by presenting a perspective that restores Pride to the ranks of the virtues.ⁱⁱⁱ I shall show how the conception of Pride that I will advocate has its roots in Aristotle though it is supplanted by a conception of Humility in the intervening centuries. I will further show how that concept of Humility causes a Virtue Theory to be somewhat difficult to defend. Finally, I will argue that a feminist approach to the virtues makes accessible a variant of the Aristotelian conception of Pride and in the process, eliminates the difficulty that the concept of Humility as a virtue entails. I do not argue that feminism is the only approach which makes accessible this particular conception of pride nor that only feminist thinkers have advocated it, only (1) that in contemporary discourse, it is feminist thinkers who have both raised the issue and offered the reformulated concept of pride as an alternative to the more dominant contemporary approach which lists humility among the virtues and pride among the vices and (2) that this reformulated concept of pride makes defense of at Virtue Theory more plausible than many of the contemporary attempts which included humility as a virtue

and pride as a vice.

I. The Pride of Aristotle

Given much of the contemporary literature concerning pride/humility, one might be surprised to discover Aristotle's view on the matter. As Richard Taylor has so aptly pointed out, "we think of virtue as the expression of a benevolent will, such that a virtuous person is marked by selflessness and kindness."^{iv} Aristotle's view of pride is not the contemporary one. Indeed, rather than a negative understanding of Pride, Aristotle's is quite positive; and on John Cottingham's view, marked by partiality rather than selflessness. He writes, "In a way which is perhaps hard fully to appreciate for those influenced by the later Christian tradition of humility and self-denial, Aristotelian courage is linked to *kudos*, the Homeric conception of self-esteem, the desire to display prowess, to win applause, to avoid the ultimate shame of losing face before one's fellows."^v Cottingham further notes that it "would be tedious to unravel the way in which this sort of partialism manifests itself throughout the Aristotelian catalogue of virtues."^{vi} However, he does an excellent job of showing how proper self-regard functions as partially constitutive of a great many, if not all, of the "Aristotelian catalogue of virtues". The excellences of "liberality, or magnificence, of magnanimity, of proper ambition ... all presuppose" self-regard on the part of the agent.^{vii} In an effort to avoid the tedium of which Cottingham is aware, I will merely examine two of the virtues of which pride plays an integral part.

Cottingham has already remarked about the connection between proper self-regard (and even a measure of partiality) and bravery or courage. Aristotle defines bravery as the mean between "what inspires confidence and ... what is frightening". [1116a10-11] After defining the virtue, he lists in descending order five other states that are often termed "bravery" but which fail to be identical with the virtue: the bravery of citizens, experience and expertise, emotion, hopefulness, ignorance. What is of interest is Aristotle's treatment of the bravery of citizens which is, of those states commonly called bravery, the nearest approximation of the virtue. In his treatment of the bravery of citizens, he writes, "This is most like the [genuine] bravery described above, since it is caused by a virtue; for its cause is shame and desire for something fine - for honour - and aversion from reproach, which is disgraceful." [1116b27ff] The desire for honor, the very essence of the pride that is derided as vicious in much contemporary discourse, is one of the causes of the state that is nearest the virtue. On Aristotle's view, the desire for honour is not lamentable, but praiseworthy. Part of the reason for this, it would seem, is that Aristotle rates honour as the highest external good. [1123b20-21]

It should be noted that Aristotle is not advocating abject self-absorption with this view. Despite honour being placed as the highest external good, a life in pursuit of honour is not a life of virtue. He states that a conception of the good as honour is "too superficial" to be construed as wholly constitutive the good life. [1095b22-27] Rather, the virtuous person recognizes her worth and is not overwhelmed when honours commensurate with her worth are bestowed upon her. Aristotle goes to great lengths to establish the proper place for Pride in the virtues constitutive of the happy life. This he does in his discussion of Magnanimity, which has been alternatively translated as "Pride". In his notes on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Terence Irwin explicates the aspects of Honour with which Magnanimity is concerned. It is concerned with Honour in its following aspects:

- (a) how and for what a person honours and esteems himself;
- (b) what he expects others to honour him for;

(c) which other people he honours, and for what;

(d) which other people he wants to honour him.^{viii}

What should be fairly evident from this list is discussion is that the magnanimous person is the one with the right attitude toward Honour. Since Honour is a good, this proper attitude is not one of debasement, but neither is it one of self-aggrandizement. The virtuous person recognizes (1) that Honour is a good, (2) that as the highest external good it is an important part of human flourishing, and thus, as a result of (1) and (2), (3) “demands it (honour) for his virtue”^x.

Given this view, it is not at all surprising that Cottingham interprets the Aristotelian virtues as requiring self-regard, or “partiality”, for acquisition of the virtues and for a life of *eudaimonia*. Since Magnanimity (or Pride) is conceived as merely *appropriate* self-regard by Aristotle, Irwin wonders if the contrast between magnanimity and the Christian view of humility is fully appropriate. He writes, “The justice of the contrast is unclear.”^x I suspect that as the next section unfolds, the justification of the contrast will become somewhat more clear.

II. The Humility of Augustine

Between Aristotle and the Reformation, Augustine is probably one of the thinkers with the most influence on contemporary attitudes toward pride. Yet the two could hardly be less similar. In his *Confessions*, Augustine argues that pride is not only a vice, but the primal vice from which all the others come. His argument begins with an understanding of evil and its relation to the human will. On Augustine’s view,

(1) Evil is one kind of flaw (and one kind only) - a breakdown in a rational, free will

(2) The flawed will turns away from God *and* gathers lower creatures about itself^{xi}

Neither of these seem to entail any particular difficulty for pride. However the respite is short-lived. Augustine defines pride as follows:

(3) Pride is self-glorifying attempts to rely on oneself to *any* degree^{xii}

Thus, pride is seen as a human being “becoming his own principle” of organization of the cosmos. Placing oneself in the place of God. As such, is clearly (on Augustine’s view) a form of idolatry. Given that pride is a form of idolatry, Augustine argues further that:

(4) Self-idolizing *pride* becomes the source of absolute disorder, that is, evil^{xiii}

(5) So, pride is *a* vice.

But Augustine argues for an even stronger view. Pride is not simply **a** vice, pride is the paradigmatic example of vice. It is the chief and foundational vice out of which all other vices flow. As such, it is the primal sin. Indeed, pride is given its perhaps more recognizable moniker by Augustine himself: Original Sin. That argument goes something like this:

- (1) Evil arises out of a free (but pride-ridden) yearning

It is here that (3) above becomes somewhat more important. Since pride is an attempt to rely on oneself to *any* degree, then even yearning for the good, if tinged at all with pride, is evil, on Augustine's view. This is so, according to Augustine, because pride is characterized by "seeking happiness and rest" under the mask of virtue.^{xiv} Since this is the case, pride is inherently self-deceptive. As a result, Augustine argues that

- (2) Pride results in the agony of a divided will which means that "the personhood of soul-body unity suffers complete damage."^{xv}

Pride, then, is the antithesis of human flourishing on Augustine's view, because it not only causes harm to the self, it actually causes it to suffer "complete damage" through the agony of being divided upon itself. Because of that deep divide in the self, Augustine thinks that the self will go to great lengths to remedy the split, pursuing desires it thinks efficacious for this purpose. Thus, Augustine comes to the conclusion

- (3) Out of pride grows "endless desires of all kinds", the several vices that can be collected under the heading "Concupiscence."

Since even a genuine aspiration toward the good, if it contains even a bit of pridefulness, is a vice, and since these aspirations (along with those which are not "toward the good") grows out of pride, Augustine argues ultimately that

- (4) Pride is the chief vice.

Pride, as conceived by Augustine, is perhaps the deadliest of what came to be characterized as the seven deadly sins. Since pride is an attempt to rely on oneself to any degree whatsoever, then only radical dependence upon God can be the proper corrective. This is precisely the corrective which that great doctor of the Church, Augustine, prescribes. However, on his view, such a radical dependence entails a similarly radical negation of self. Anything other than such a self-negating attitude is an instance of Original Sin. Simply put, obedience to God (and by extension, to proper authority) is required.

This Augustinian concept of pride has some rather immediate consequences. Among the implications of Augustine's view are: (1) Pride is removed from canon of virtues, (2) Pride is seen as the chief vice, (3) Its opposite (humility) becomes cardinal virtue, and (4) Since humility is the polar opposite of pride, it becomes understood as the most important virtue.^{xvi}

Humility, on this view, required acknowledged limits, and those limits finally appeared as a circle of authority, in this case, Christian authority.^{xvii} On the level of society, recognition of "proper authority" and the limits it imposed meant obedience to the Church. In the household, recognition of proper authority devolved into obedience to the male "head of house". Thus, the conception of pride as the chief and greatest vice plays a direct and rather obvious role in the systematic subjugation of women for which the medieval Church (and its successors) are rightly maligned.^{xviii} Admittedly, Augustine sees this sort of humility not as limiting but as profoundly freeing. By having a proper posture toward God and God's creation, one gained insight into what

was the right act in the right situation at the right time. However, this “proper posture” was one marked not by an Aristotelian “appropriate self-regard”, but by a rather strict self-abasement.

III. Contemporary Humility and the Virtues

Judging from much of contemporary literature about virtue ethics and the virtues, it seems that Augustine has won the day rather than Aristotle. In a way that is much more reminiscent of Augustine and Aquinas than it is of Aristotle, self-negation appears to play a rather integral role in many defenses and explications of virtue theory because it seems to play a crucial role in the defining of the content of many of the virtues as well as the character of the virtuous life. Two theorists who express this sort of a view are Iris Murdoch and Philippa Foot.

Iris Murdoch, in “The Sovereignty of Good over other Concepts”, lists what she takes to be the requirements of an ethical theory. On her view,

- (1) An ethical system must include a realistic examination of human nature and activities,
- (2) An ethical system always commends an ideal,

and

- (3) The ideal should be a worthy ideal.^{xix}

(2) and (3) are the constitutive parts of Murdoch’s assertion that “since an ethical system cannot but commend an idea, then it should commend a worthy ideal.”^{xx} Thus, she comes to the conclusion that

- (4) Ethics should be an hypothesis about good conduct and how it can be achieved.

With this conception of what is required of an ethical theory, she goes on to suggest that the answer to the question “How can we make ourselves better?” is partly in the form of metaphor. The metaphor that she selects as her prime example is that of “unselfing”. The content of this notion becomes more evident as her article develops. She writes that, “Our attachments tend to be selfish and strong, and the transformation of our loves from selfishness to unselfishness is sometimes hard even to conceive of.”^{xxi}

“Unselfing”, then, seems to involve a casting away of self-interest. She seems to be of the opinion that self-interest gets in the way of addressing difficult ethical questions.^{xxii} Love, understood as the “exercise of justice and realism and really *looking*” is what enables one to come up with the right answers to these difficult questions. She writes, “The difficulty [in expressing this love] is to keep the attention fixed upon the real situation and to prevent it from returning surreptitiously to the self with consolation of self-pity, resentment, fantasy, and despair.”^{xxiii} Thus, it seems that the self can actually keep us from virtue. Further support for this claim is found in her assertion that “The concept Good resists collapse into the selfish empirical consciousness.”^{xxiv}

While not strictly endorsing humility, the “unselfing” metaphor strikes me as ultimately advocating an exercise in self-negation. That such is the case becomes clearer as she further develops her understanding of human nature. It is her view that, “We are largely mechanical creatures, the slaves of relentlessly strong selfish forces the nature of which we scarcely

comprehend. ... The self is a divided thing and the whole of it cannot be redeemed any more than it can be known.”^{xxv} From this view of the self, she moves on to her conclusion, namely that, “The humble man, because he sees himself as nothing, can see other things as they are.”^{xxvi} Thus, because one can “unself” oneself, it becomes possible to see things as they are.^{xxvii} Further, because the self is not getting in the way of the “unself-ed” person, she is more likely to arrive at the right answer for a given situation. Not that this should be construed as easy. Indeed, Murdoch is of the opinion that this sort of unselfing humility is not easy at all. On her view, humility is a rare virtue and an unfashionable one and one which is often hard to discern.

Philippa Foot also defends a view of humility as a virtue in her exposition and defense of virtue theory. Her argument, like Murdoch’s, depends on a particular view of human nature. In Foot’s case, that view is expressed by (1) and (2) below:

- (1) Human beings do not get on well without the virtues^{xxviii}
- (2) A human beings need to have the virtues for their own sake and for that of his fellows^{xxix}

If (1) and (2) are the case as Foot asserts, then it is not at all implausible that she should reach the following intermediate conclusion.

- (3) So, the virtues are beneficial

On Foot’s view, the virtues are more than simply beneficial, they are to be understood as general beneficial characteristics. With this view of the virtues, she moves to a conception of their opposite - the vices; or as Foot calls them, the “moral failings”. It would seem that her view can be characterized as follows:

- (4) Moral failings, that is “vices”, are not beneficial and human beings would do well without them.

(4) is supplied by me, but it seems a reasonable reading of Foot, given the argument that she takes to establish the virtues as beneficial. The next steps in her argument, and the ones that bear directly on this paper, concern pride. On her view,

- (5) Courage, temperance, and wisdom are beneficial.
- (6) Pride is not beneficial.

If (5) and (6) are so, then the following conclusion is all but inevitable.

- (7) So, courage, et al, are virtues and Pride is a vice.

That she holds the view expressed in this conclusion is born out by her quite explicit statement: “Courage, temperance and wisdom benefit both the person who has these dispositions and other people as well; and moral failings such as *pride*, vanity, worldliness, and avarice harm both their possessor and others, though chiefly perhaps the former.”^{xxx}

Given this argument, Foot is committed to the view that pride is a moral failing; that is, a vice.

However, it seems reasonable to expect that if it were shown that Humility tended to have deleterious effects or that Pride was beneficial to the individual and to others then Foot would have to concede that Pride is not a moral failing but one of those “general beneficial characteristics.” Such a demonstration would yield the following

(6') Pride is beneficial, and Humility is not beneficial

(7) So, Pride is a virtue and Humility is a vice.

However, Foot does not seem to anticipate that such an argument might be advanced, nor does she consider the possibility that humility might not be as beneficial as she assumes it to be. Indeed, Pride continues on the list of the vices and self-negating humility remains the corresponding virtue. In noting that the virtues have some correspondence to the will, “understood in its widest sense”^{xxxix}, Foot appeals to Aquinas’ understanding of wisdom: It “belongs to a power under the direction of the will.”^{xxxix} However, as we have seen, that power to direct the will is precisely the power to exercise the virtue of Humility which in turn is an exercise in self-negation.

In both arguments (Foot’s and Murdoch’s), self-negating humility has played an important role in establishing both the content of the other virtues and the content of the moral life. This integral role for self-negation makes defenses of virtue theory problematic. In the first place, a defense of virtue theory becomes problematic for advocates of views like Murdoch’s and Foot’s because those views break virtue theory from its historic moorings in Aristotle. Of its own, this would not be particularly troubling. However, in departing from Aristotle at so key a point, makes it difficult to rely on his arguments for the virtues to support their own views.

Since the goal of a virtue theory is to present a case for human flourishing, then views like Foot’s and Murdoch’s are even more problematic. This is so because they construe something as a virtue (humility) that is actually destructive of human flourishing; which is to say, it is difficult to live well and practice self-negating humility at the same time. Tara Smith has stated well the insidious nature of the conception of humility as the virtue and pride as the vice. She writes,

Humility and modesty primarily concern two things: a person’s aspiration and a person’s presentation of herself to others. Typically, the modest or humble person does not want very much. ... Humility and modesty also refer to the way that a person projects her abilities and accomplishments. ... These presentation and aspiration dimensions are probably related. If a person believes the belittling self-image that she projects, she will not view herself as worthy of much, so it will seem appropriate that she trim her aspirations and make do with the minimum.^{xxxix}

All in all, this does not seem like a very likely way to encourage, enhance, or achieve human flourishing. The question becomes, what might a feminist approach do to alleviate these difficulties and in so doing shore up the defenses of a virtue theory.

IV. The Pride of a Feminist Approach

Annette Baier asks one of the more obvious questions in considering whether or not there is such a thing as a feminist approach to moral theory: “How will any moral theories they [women, feminists] produce differ from those produced by men?”^{xxxix} One might expect that for a theory to

truly compete with the theories of men like Kant, Augustine, Aquinas, and Aristotle, it must look something like their efforts. That is to say, the theories ought to be explicit, universal, and vivid in their coercive power.^{xxxv} Baier freely recognizes that such an effort has not been forthcoming from the ranks of feminists.^{xxxvi} That such a systematized, comprehensive theory has not been advanced by a feminist scholar might suggest that the contributions of feminists are merely critiques or correctives of the canon of moral theory. In arguing that there is a way in which feminism can be understood as more than a criticism of canonical views, Baier begins with a list of the “different voices” of women philosophers.^{xxxvii}

Baier does not present a developed system of her own. Instead, she discusses the “mosaic of topics women moral philosophers have chosen to address.”^{xxxviii} In a similar fashion, Rosemarie Tong has also noted the broad diversity that marks the thought of women moral philosophers, noting that the diversity has been thought to indicate the weakness of feminist thinking. She, however, argues that it is precisely the wide diversity that marks the strength of feminism. She writes,

Because feminist thought is kaleidoscopic, the reader’s preliminary impression may be one of chaos and confusion, or dissension and disagreement, of fragmentation and splintering. But a closer inspection will always reveal new visions, new structures, new relationships for personal and political life, all of which will be different tomorrow than today. ... feminist thought permits each woman to think her own thoughts. Apparently, not the truth but the truths are setting women free.^{xxxix}

Among the topics Baier lists which would also reflect Tong’s “truths” are equal care and concern, loyalty, and love. Baier, however, does go on to offer a concept around which this constellation of other concerns might be seen to revolve; trust. So, while she does not fully develop a comprehensive system whose center is the virtue of trust, she suggests that such a system might be able to stand as an explicit, universal, and vivid theory.

While Baier does not attempt to develop this potential system further than a brief sketch, her discussion points to the role of a feminist approach. Such an approach need not seek to create a new category of moral theory to be placed alongside Deontology, Teleology, and Virtue. Rather, it critiques, corrects, and at times radically alters the construction of the concepts of those theories. Thus, a feminist approach could, as Baier does, advance a conception of virtue that suggests a substantive revision broader theory, elevating the virtue of trust to the ultimate position. This, obviously, does not entail that the revised theory is then something other than a theory of virtue. Similarly in the arenas of Deontology and Teleology. For example, one might advance a Deontological conception of ethics that was stripped of the rather virulent sexism of Kant. The theory would no longer be Kantian, perhaps, but it would still be a Deontological ethical theory. It is in this way *mutatis mutandis* that a feminist conception of Pride can re-elevate that concept to the level of virtue without compromising the resulting theory’s place in the category of Virtue Theory.^{xl}

Hopefully, the preceding section has begun to make somewhat more clear the some of the possibilities for understanding the relationships between the new structures that form the kaleidoscope of feminist thought and the existing frameworks for ethical theorizing. The question would remain, however, why a *feminist theory* seems uniquely qualified to render the service of restoring Pride to the pantheon of the virtues. It is to that question that I now turn.

One of the fundamental contributions of the feminist movement has been a demand that women be seen as something significantly more than second-class citizens. Indeed, Carol Gilligan and Nel

Noddings and before them Susan B. Anthony and Frances Willard were in the vanguard of a demand upon society for a recognition of the equal worth of women and women's experience. It has not always been a successful advance. The culture, heavily influenced by the canonized Augustinian conception of human nature and primal sin, has often perpetrated considerable oppression against women, demanding great humility and submission to male authority as woman's proper lot in life. Such marginalization has provided feminists with a unique perspective. Women have borne the demand for self-negating humility quite heavily.^{xli} The operative principle in this situation is power. As Baier writes, "Coercive power is possessed by those shaping our conception of the virtues and expecting us to display them, approving when we do, disapproving and perhaps shunning us when we do not."^{xlii} That this coercive power has manifested itself as demands for self-negating humility has been pointed out by both Baier and Marjorie Suchocki. Baier argues in her article that there has been a long exploitation of women by men who strove to "perpetuate their [women's] own and their daughter's servitude"^{xliii} This point is given even more force by Suchocki as she argues that "feminists, writing from the perspective of the marginalized, find the problem of sin rooted in the great challenge of becoming oneself."^{xliiv} Such lack of self is precisely the attitude advocated by Augustine and pervading the admonitions to self-negation in much of contemporary virtue theorizing.

If Humility has these rather untoward consequences, then its position as one of the virtues (or perhaps, the cardinal virtue) is suspect. Further, the defenses of Virtue Theory offered by Murdoch and Foot are also in rather dire straits. This is so in Murdoch's case because the advocated conception of humility tells against her use of the metaphor of "unselfing" as the descriptive example of a virtue theory. An ethical system that relied so heavily upon the metaphor of "unselfing" would fail to meet no less than three of the requirements that Murdoch sets out as the basic requirements for an ethical theory: (1) An ethical system must include a realistic examination of human nature and activities [self-negation is not such a realistic attribution to human nature], (2) An ethical system always commends an ideal [self-negation is not such an ideal], and (3) The ideal should be a worthy ideal [the difficulty with (3) follows from the difficulty with (2)]. Whatever the truth conditions of the requirements that Murdoch states as the basic ones for an ethical theory, her paradigmatic metaphor of virtuous behavior fails to meet them.

Foot's predicament is quite similar. If it be granted that the virtues are beneficial and the vices harmful, then Foot's (6) Pride is harmful, along with her advocacy of pride's opposite, humility, as a virtue becomes problematic. Humility it seems has been shown to be deleterious. This is so because it violates her first two premises: (1) Human beings do not get on well without the virtues [It seems that human beings do not get on well with the "virtue" of Humility], and (2) A human beings need to have the virtues for their own sake and for that of his fellows [The "virtue" of humility does not seem to be needed for the sake of the one possessing it as it seems detrimental to her]. Foot, in turn, advances the view that Pride is a moral failing. This puts her in direct opposition to Aristotle and thus sets her defense of Virtue Theory adrift from its ancient, and perhaps more helpful, roots. Distancing oneself from Aristotle is not necessarily detrimental of its own, yet coupled with the much less plausible defense of the virtues that results from that departure it suggests that the departure itself is somewhat ill-advised. At the same time, it does not seem like Foot or Murdoch can simply substitute an Aristotelian concept of Pride for the concept of humility that is operative in their theories. In each case, while the "virtue" of Humility *per se* plays but a small role in their conceptions, the attitude of self-sacrifice and self-negation (or perhaps "unselfing") plays an integral role in the very formulation of the content of many of the other virtues. Eliminating Humility as a virtue seems to cause the entire edifice to crumble.

So, the question becomes, “What might a feminist say to renovate pride and address this difficulty?” Quite simply, and perhaps obviously at this point, a feminist approach could (1) restore to the theory of the virtues a more Aristotelian conception of pride^{xlv} while at the same time (2) holding that self-negation is properly defined as a vice. I suspect that (2) has been adequately shown and (1) would need to be a conception of pride that could then inform the content of the other virtues. One feminist who has advanced such a view of (1) is Elaine Pagels.

Pagels, in her book *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*, is addressing her comments primarily to that part of academia that concerns itself with topics like sin; which is to say, the theological community. That her works have been less widely read in philosophical circles is testimony to the fact that the semi-permeable membrane that existed between the two disciplines in Augustine’s day has hardened considerably in the interim. However, I hope that her deeply theological language does not detract from the substance of her argument.

In the first place, Pagels recognizes what Augustinian conceptions of pride and humility have done to the discourse surrounding questions about the living of life. Further, she argues quite convincingly that the “ideas concerning sexuality, moral freedom, and human value ... have continued to affect our culture and everyone in it, Christian or not, ever since.”^{xlvi} On her view, Augustine’s conception of Original Sin (the primal sin of Pride) was cast in masculine terms of rebellion against God and usurpation of authority. The resultant demand for recognition of and submission to authority became the hallmark virtue of Humility. However, that “virtue”, in theory and practice, became a requirement on the part of women to give up their “selves,” subordinating themselves to the absolute authority of the male head of house. She quotes from Augustine’s discussion of the marriage relationship: “a husband is meant to rule over his wife as the spirit rules over the flesh.”^{xlvii} Such demands for self-negation made it difficult for women to develop a “self” or to maintain an integrated “self” if one should develop. Thus, Pagels names Humility as women’s sin. Which is to say, she names humility as a vice that is perhaps peculiarly feminine.

Leaving aside the gender assignment of the vice, Pagels makes an excellent point. If it is the case that human flourishing is understood as the goal of virtue and a measure of selfhood is necessary for flourishing, then the systematic subordination of self that humility demands is profoundly counterproductive. Men, Pagels notes, have not had quite as onerous a imposition in this realm because, even on Augustine’s picture of the bondage of the will, men still had some measure of ability for self-government. Further, in the structure of the marriage relationship, for example, the husband was given the responsibility for governing the wife and children. Thus, the potential for self-development and a measure of flourishing was not denied men in the same way that the concepts of pride and humility denied it to women.

Pagels then suggests that for a woman to overcome the impositions of such a system (which has descendents in the commendations of self-negation in Foot and Murdoch, for example) that there must be freedom to develop herself.^{xlviii} The implication to which Pagels’ seems committed is that, in the arena of human flourishing, some sort of equality must obtain between men and women. For that to occur, the self-negation that attends the “virtue” of Humility must be denied and in its place should be substituted a recognition of the intrinsic value that a person possesses. At the very least, one must see oneself as something somewhat more than “contemptible” by nature. Thus, Pagels seems to be advocating a sort of “appropriate self-regard” as necessary for human flourishing. Pride, then, would be seen as “regarding oneself as of particular value in the appropriate circumstances and in the appropriate manner.” This seems none to radical a view.^{xlix}

Borrowing the argument for the virtues from Foot it seems that we would have something like the following:

- (1) Human beings do not get on well without the virtues
- (2) Human beings need to have the virtues for their own sake and for that of his fellows¹
- (3) So, the virtues are beneficial
- (4') Human beings do not get on well without an appropriate regard for the self, recognizing their worth in appropriate fashion.
- (5') This sort of Pride is beneficial
- (6') Humility is not beneficial.
- (7') So, Pride is a virtue and Humility is a vice.

This seems rather an innocuous restructuring of the argument. However, as alluded to above, such a restructuring could very well cause the edifice of Foot's (and Murdoch's) theories of the virtues to crumble. Indeed, re-introducing Pride into the web of virtues does probably entail some rather detailed work to reconfigure the content of the other virtues accordingly. It is fortunate, then, that Aristotle has already done much of that heavy-lifting for us. As Cottingham has argued, Aristotle has shown how proper self-regard is partially constitutive of a great many, if not all, of the Aristotelian catalogue of virtues.

That Aristotle has already conceived of a way in which Pride informs many, if not all, of the virtues does not tell the whole story, however. It is rather difficult, after all, to translate a system of thought (examples and all) from the fourth century B.C.E. to the late twentieth century C.E. For example, one might still be concerned with the dissonance Aristotle's work has in the ear of the modern reader, particularly in light of some of his more misogynistic passages. Here, a feminist approach to the virtues that reinterprets and incorporates the work of Aristotle into a modern framework is particularly helpful. For example, a Pagelsian recovery of Aristotle's conception of Pride can be understood to begin the recovery of the content of the other virtues as well. The benefit here should be fairly straightforward. Given that

- (1) Pride is partially constitutive of a great many of the Aristotelian virtues while Humility functions in that role in theories like those of Foot and Murdoch,

and

- (2) Humility seems to make human flourishing a problematic goal at best,

and

- (3) Human flourishing does not seem to contradict Aristotle's view,

then

- (4) It seems rather clear that Aristotle's theory is significantly distinct from Foot's or Murdoch's

in fairly important ways.

Pagels' recovery of a variant of Aristotelian pride as a virtue re-introduces a more Aristotelian conception of Virtue Theory into contemporary discourse.

At the same time, a feminist approach can operate as a sort of filter that strains the overt misogyny that might be rightly or wrongly attributed to Aristotle. For example, a feminist is much less likely to advocate a view that entails viewing women as a natural "deformity" of a masculine ideal. Reading Aristotle through such an interpretive filter has the significant benefit of making it possible to conceive of actually attaining human flourishing while at the same time making the concept of "human flourishing" explicitly available to all of humanity. Thus it seems that Pagels has provided the beginnings of a framework from within which Aristotle might be interpreted without some of the baggage of antiquity which, hopefully, has a decreasing number of analogues in contemporary society.

Hence, I have shown that from what seems an unlikely source (feminism), an Aristotelian virtue of Pride is restored to its place in the list of canonical virtues. Such a restoration has the benefit of making the Virtue Theory that includes Pride among the virtues much more defensible than many of the more contemporary constructions of Virtue.

Notes

ⁱ For a particularly good exploration of the cultural backlash against the caricature of the "feminist agenda," see Susan Faludi's *Backlash*, 1991, Crown Publishers, Inc., New York, New York.

ⁱⁱ For the sake of this paper, I consider the canon of traditional ethical theories to be comprised of the following three: Deontological, Teleological, and Virtue. This is itself an arguable point, though one that I will not argue in any depth here. For example, Dale Jamieson in "Method and Moral Theory," lists only Deontology and Utility (the prevalent Teleological model) when he presents his understand of the "Theorists" side of ethical discourse. Similarly in "On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics," Robert Loudon notes that "contemporary textbook typologies of ethics still divide the terrain of normative ethical theory into the teleological and deontological." (p201) He then argues that this division is a proper and exhaustive division of the "terrain." The issue, it seems, is whether Virtue Theory has a proper place alongside Deontology and Teleology/Utility. My answer, rather dogmatically, is "Yes." However, I proffer this bit of dogmatism with a bit of indignation (if not argumentation). It seems rather odd to include Kant and Mill, for example, in the canon of ethical theorists and at the same time exclude Aristotle. Yet that seems to be exactly what Loudon is explicitly advocating (and Jamieson somewhat more implicitly so). For much more comprehensive arguments for the inclusion of Virtue Theory in the canon of ethical theories, see Michael Stocker, "How Emotions Reveal Value and Help Cure the Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories"; Roger Crisp, "Modern Moral Philosophy and the Virtues;" and Rosalind Hursthouse, "Normative Virtue Ethics." These three articles are all in *How Should One Live: Essays on the Virtues*; Roger Crisp, ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996. Crisp, pp1-18; Hursthouse, pp19-36; Stocker, pp173-190. Jamieson's work is from *A Companion to Ethics*, Peter Singer, ed., Blackwell Publishing, 1993, pp476-490. Loudon's is from *Virtue Ethics*, Roger Crisp and Michael Slote, ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997, pp201-216.

ⁱⁱⁱ I should note that I am working with a conception Virtue Theory that operates using a List Theory of the virtues. I do this for two reasons: (1) It seems to be the sort of theory that Aristotle advocates in his *Nicomachean Ethics* and (2) List Theories seem to have fairly significant benefits over their primary competitors; namely Desire-Fulfillment Theories. For an excellent and fairly thorough treatment of the differences between List Theories and Desire-Fulfillment Theories and the advantages that the former has over the latter, see Brad Hooker, "Does Moral Virtue Constitute a Benefit to the Agent?", *How Should One Live: Essays on the Virtues*; Roger Crisp, ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996. pp141-156.

^{iv} Richard Taylor, "Ancient Wisdom and Modern Folly," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. XIII, 1988, p55.

^v John Cottingham, "Partiality and the Virtues," *How Should One Live?*, p59. This link between Aristotle's conception of the virtues and the Homeric renditions of them is also made quite nicely by Alasdair MacIntyre, "The Nature of the Virtues", *Virtue Ethics*,

pp118-140.

^{vi} *ibid.*, 62.

^{vii} *ibid.*

^{viii} Terence Irwin, "Notes on Aristotles" *Nicomachean Ethics*", *NE*, translated by Terence Irwin, Hackett Publishing, Indianapolis, IN, 1985. p326.

^{ix} *ibid.*, 326.

^x *ibid.*

^{xi} William Mallard, *Language and Love: Introducing Augustine's Religious Thought Through the Confessions Story*, Penn State University Press, University Park, PA, 1994. p99-100. emphasis mine.

^{xii} *ibid.*, 111.

^{xiii} *ibid.*, 100.

^{xiv} *Ibid.*, 99.

^{xv} *ibid.*, 112.

^{xvi} *ibid.*, 128.

^{xvii} *ibid.*, 219-20. It should be noted that Augustine is not the only doctor of the church who prescribes self-negating humility as the proper remedy for overcoming the primal malady of pride. Thomas of Aquinas adds the following admonitions, "humility conveys praiseworthy self-abasement" and humility is construed as "acknowledging oneself contemptible." *Summa Theologica*, Question 161, "Of Humility," translation: The Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Burn Oates and Washburn Ltd. of London, publishers, 1932.

^{xviii} Indeed, Augustine also serves as a tragic example of the self-negation his conception of pride required of him. In what hopefully sounds heinous to the modern ear, upon Augustine's "discovery" that such humility (and self-negation) were required as Virtue, he dismissed his concubine with whom he had lived monogamously for thirteen years and with whom he had had a son Adeodatus. Adeodatus was dismissed along with his mother. Augustine's mother Monica then selected a bride for Augustine so that he might not be inflamed by the passions but might exercise his new-found "self-control" within boundaries sanctioned by the Church. So, the thirty-nine year old Augustine married the twelve year old selected for him by his mother.

^{xix} Iris Murdoch, "The Sovereignty of Good over other Concepts," *Virtue Ethics*, pp99-100.

^{xx} *ibid.*

^{xxi} *ibid.*, 109.

^{xxii} The questions posed and to which the "right answers" will apply are "Should a retarded child be kept at home or sent to an institution? Should an elderly relation who is a trouble-maker be cared for or asked to go away? Should an unhappy marriage be continued for the sake of the children? Should I leave my family in order to do political work? Should I neglect them in order to practise my art?" (Murdoch, 109)

^{xxiii} *ibid.*

^{xxiv} *ibid.*, 110.

^{xxv} *ibid.*, 114.

^{xxvi} *ibid.*, 117.

^{xxvii} It seems to me that in ignoring one's value or one's interests, the "unselfed" person does not see things as they are, but sees things through a warped perspective.

^{xxviii} Foot, 164.

^{xxix} *ibid.*

^{xxx} Philippa Foot, "Virtues and Vices," *Virtue Ethics*, p164-5. Emphasis mine.

^{xxxi} *ibid.*, 166.

^{xxxii} *ibid.*, 167.

^{xxxiii} Tara Smith, "The Practice of Pride," *Journal of Social Philosophy and Policy*, 1996, p1-33.

^{xxxiv} Annette Baier, "What do Women Want in a Moral Theory?", *Virtue Ethics*, p263.

^{xxxv} Jamieson, 477.

^{xxxvi} Baier, 264-5.

^{xxxvii} I have reproduced Baier's list here because within it she has demonstrated the breadth of feminist theorizing:

When I think of Philippa Foot's work on the moral virtues, Elizabeth Anscombe's work on intention and on modern moral philosophy, Iris Murdoch's philosophical writings, Ruth Barcan Marcus's work on moral dilemmas, the work of the radical feminist moral philosophers who are not content with orthodox Marxist lines of thought, Jenny Teichman's book on illegitimacy, Susan Wolf's articles, Claudia Card's essay on mercy, Sabina Lovibond's writings, Gabriele Taylor's work on pride, love, and on integrity, Cora Diamond's and Mary Midgley's work on our attitude toward animals, Sissela Bok's work on lying and on secrecy,

Virginia Held's work, the work of Alison Jaggar, Marilyn Frye, and many others, I seem to hear a different voice from the standard moral philosophers' voice. (p263)

^{xxxviii} Baier, 271.

^{xxxix} Tong, *Feminist Theory*, 238.

^{xl} Incidentally, this is precisely what Philippa Foot sees Aquinas doing with Aristotle's theory. She writes, "By and large Aquinas followed Aristotle - sometimes even heroically - where Aristotle gave an opinion, and where St. Thomas is on his own, as in developing the doctrine of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, and in his theocentric doctrine of happiness, he still uses an Aristotelian framework where he can." (Foot, 163-4) That is not to say that the theory is Aristotle's. But the theory is surely one within the Virtue Theory framework, as opposed to a Deontological or Utilitarian one.

^{xli} That the burden of self-negation has been borne more heavily by women than men seems fairly plausible. For rather convincing arguments that this is indeed the case, see Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, Continuum Press, New York, 1994; Baier; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Feminism Without Illusions*, UNC Press, Chapel Hill, 1991; bell hooks, *From Margin To Center*, South End Press, 1989; Marilyn Frye, "Male Chauvinism: A Conceptual Analysis" and Alison Jaggar, "Abortion and a Woman's Right to Decide," *Philosophy and Sex*, Prometheus Books, Buffalo, NY, 1975.

^{xlii} Baier, 273.

^{xliii} *ibid.*, 276.

^{xliv} Suchocki

^{xlv} That I suggest that a feminist would want to redeem an Aristotelian concept of anything is a problematic suggestion, at least on the view of someone like Susan Moller Okin. Much of Okin's argument in her paper, "Feminism, Moral Development, and the Virtues" in *How Should One Live?* is directed explicitly at attempts to "rehabilitate" Aristotle and show that his views are not necessarily as misogynistic as they might seem *prima facie*. I find her argument both a bit troubling and, in points, rather convincing. It is important to note that She does not condemn Plato similarly. Okin notes that philosophers like Martha Nussbaum have suggested that had Aristotle applied "his own methods properly, he 'would have ascertained that the capabilities of women were (as Plato already had argued) comparable to those of men.'" However, the two philosophers (Okin and Nussbaum) disagree on the extent to which Aristotle's thought can be rehabilitated into an alliance with modern feminists. Okin continues, "She [Nussbaum] concludes that Aristotle can prove a valuable ally for feminists in search of a moral theory more adequate and complete than liberalism." (213n4) Okin finds this unlikely in the extreme. It is widely accepted (even by Nussbaum) that Aristotle makes some very unfortunate comments about women and women's nature in places like the *Politics* and particularly the *Generation of Animals*. As Okin points out, Aristotle concludes that "women, 'a deformity of nature,' came into existence only to perform their (lesser) role in the sexual reproduction of men." (213) However, Okin also recognizes that one might read the *Nicomachean Ethics* without noticing the rather virulent sexism of other writings. She dismisses this as a fairly naive reading of the *NE*. A careful reading of only the *NE* would still point to Aristotle's sexism: e.g., it seems, from the examples, that the only one who can attain virtue is the free male head of house. I do not find it troubling that Aristotle's examples are almost always cast in masculine terms. Such was the case in most philosophical writing, even that done by women, until the 1970's. However, the content of some of the examples is troubling. For example, the "magnanimous person seems to have slow movements, a deep voice and calm speech ... he is not strident; and these are the causes of a shrill voice and hasty movements." [*NE* 1125a12-16] Okin notes that the example seems to juxtapose characteristics that are typically male with those that are stereotypically female, assigning virtue to the first and vice to the second.

It seems to me that these difficulties can be overcome, but that defenders of Aristotle are probably going to have to make more of an argument that simply dismissing some of his more explicitly misogynistic comments as "silly" aberrations as Nussbaum does. At the same time, a somewhat more reasonable view of human nature which recognizes that the master/slave or ruler/ruled metaphors are profoundly problematic as they relate to the roles of men and women would not detract from the overall theory. To use one of Okin's examples: the example of generosity depends on the possession of money, something few women possessed in Aristotle's day. It seems to me that rectifying the economic injustice inherent in the described situation would make it at least plausible that the example could be applied more universally. It seems that Okin is confusing two questions: (1) Does Aristotle apply the theory to women equally? and (2) Could the Aristotelian system (perhaps with a bit of tweaking where the examples are concerned) be applied equally to women? The answers, I suspect, are "No" and "Yes." It seems that the resulting theory (with the proper tweaking of examples) might no longer be Aristotle's, but it might very well be Aristotelian.

^{xlvi} Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*, xxviii.

^{xlvii} *ibid.*, 114.

^{xlviii} *ibid.*, xxv.

^{xlix} Though it is precisely one of the sort of ways of seeing oneself against which Augustine rails.

^l Foot, 164.

Biography

Dr. Kevin K. J. Durand is Assistant Professor of Philosophy. He has taught at Henderson State University since 1999. He completed his Ph.D. in Philosophy at the University of Oklahoma in August of 2000. He previously completed a M.A. in Philosophy at the University of Oklahoma (1997), an M. Div. in Theology at Emory University (1993) and a B.S. in Mathematics at Henderson State University (1990). Currently, Kevin serves as Vice-President and member of the Executive Committee of the Mid-South Philosophy Conference, Convener of the Process Circle, and as a member of the Henderson Honors Faculty. His latest book, Virtue: Essays in Ancient Philosophy, was published by University Press of America in April of 2004. His current projects include a collection of essays on Whitehead's theory of civilization and its implication for theories of virtue and justice. He has presented numerous papers in the areas of ethics, ancient philosophy, and philosophy of civilization during his time at Henderson.