

VIRTUE-BASED MORALITY NOT VIRTUE ETHICS

Carmine Gorga

There are some
who put morality high,
so high,
a position that makes for
reverence from far away
and non-observance from close-by.

Benedetto Croce

ABSTRACT: Morality is the daily pursuit of moral actions whose sum total results in the achievement of the moral life. It is not easy to live a moral life. That is why we need practice, practice. And much forgiveness of ourselves and others. We must constantly be on our guard against self-deceit. Our self-interest, our shortsightedness, our ignorance can easily lead us astray. A double and triple judgment from other people might help. It usually does. The moral action is the action that is prudent, just, courageous, temperate, wise, true, and full of understanding, hope, faith, and love. The moral action is not in response to a static morality, but a morality that is creative and vital, a morality in action that responds to the changing needs of the moment, a morality that stays as far away as possible from vices. We have to become responsible people in all our words and actions. After identifying who the sworn enemies of morality are, this paper will concentrate its attention on three aspects of the overall field: 1. The number of the virtues; 2. The functions that the virtues perform; and 3. The reasons for the universal (?) condemnation of vices.

KEYWORDS: Morality; Ethics; Freedom Science; Concordian economics; Relationalism; Aristotle Aquinas

INTRODUCTION

Surely sociopaths repress the knowledge of good and evil; but it is precisely this

knowledge that allows us to classify some people as sociopaths. We have been endowed by Evolution or by our Creator with the ability to distinguish good from evil.¹ We are free to pursue good or bad actions.² That is the foundation of morality³: no freedom, no moral question. It is the consequences of our choice that are deterministic⁴: We know from physics, of all mental disciplines, that for every action there is a reaction. God, Evolution, or Nature, if you will, has so organized the human character that a) If we choose a good action, peace and joy are our reward—not immediately, perhaps, but for sure; b) If we choose a bad action, interior displeasure, regret, even torment will gradually envelop us.⁵

From interior joy all good things follow: peace and prosperity follow; not immediately, not without effort, but peace and prosperity follow.⁶ Besides, not entirely facetiously, it can be said that after Jefferson assured us of the right to the “the pursuit of happiness” we are free to be in pursuit of such concrete and personal items as joy, peace, and prosperity. To put it a tiny bit more extensively, the focus of our analysis is shifted from the abstract understanding of “the nature

¹ The assumption of this paper is that, whether we individually have lost or never acquired the ability to discern good from evil, right from wrong, society as a whole knows that distinction. In any case, knowledge of the virtues—and their daily practice—make the distinction exceedingly clear. *Pace* the Consequentialists, our ability to distinguish good from evil does not assure the achievement of either good or evil. As Keynes well knew, the future is, by definition, unknown. Besides, knowing what is good does not assure knowledge of *how* to do good nor the ability to avoid an evil action. This realization does not lead to nihilism and defeatism. As Aristotle well knew, this recognition of our limited individual importance leads to the necessity of political action; the necessity to get together with other people to achieve the good society, the sane and sound society.

Even more importantly perhaps, these considerations lead to the necessity of getting together with other people to resist evil. A long conversation has to be had along these lines: Once Cervantes demolished the chivalry and idealism of the Middle Age by calling them “windmills” (hot air of exalted minds?), he corralled us—unawares, rather assuredly—toward the abyss of individualism and atomism. See, *e.g.*, Gorga (2016). Five hundred years of solitude and solipsism ought to be enough.

Two more observations. Can anyone stretch Gabriel José de la Concordia García Márquez’s work from 100 to 500 years of solitude? Do we realize that, while the literati during these last 500 years have been engaged in *fighting the windmills*, engineers have devoted their lives to the creation of working windmills—and the autocrats have been left free to own and control the windmills? Again, the “good,” the right political action is a necessity.

² Otherwise, we would be indistinguishable from a tree or a stone.

³ Morality is not a theory; morality is the description of the performance of “good” or “bad” actions.

⁴ Hence, we can say that we are free, *under* the laws of morality. See, *e.g.*, [Helliwell](#) and [Wang](#) (2019).

⁵ To answer whether there should be any rules at all, let us envisage road traffic with no rules.

⁶ From moral actions, interior joy, peace, and prosperity, more than happiness/beatitude, as in the Aristotelian/Thomist teleology of morality, follow as rather concrete results.

of the good or the nature of happiness” to the more concrete understanding of the nature of human beings.

From interior torment, all bad things follow: psychological depression, *economic* depressions,⁷ loneliness, strife, suicides, and even wars will unavoidably follow.

Had we not better get acquainted with morality?

CURRENT STATUS

At present, we do not even have agreement about the definition of morality.⁸ We prefer to call it ethics; but ethics is a polite negation of morality: See, proliferation of mostly rigid, yet constantly changing, suffocating rules of behavior that are generally proclaimed to control misbehavior that has occurred in polite society in the recent past. In this paper morality, and the moral life, are defined as a condition of humanity that results from the exercise of the virtues—all the virtues. The virtuous person, we shall realize, is the moral person.⁹ The moral person automatically, instinctively pursues the good.

The ultimate complexity that exists in this field of observation is that we can be *a little bit* less than virtuous, even a little bit immoral at times. This is the reason why, as we shall see, in love of and in constant search for the right *word* modern society lists more than 650 virtues and more than 350 vices. But this “accuracy”—

⁷ This writer’s knowledge in many fields is second-hand at best; through a long chain of reasoning in Concordian economics, it is possible to demonstrate that economic depressions come from lack of economic justice, and lack of economic justice comes from lack of love to give and to practice justice. See, *e.g.*, Gorga (2017a).

⁸ See, Footnote 3 above. Morality has undergone a slow death during the last 500 years; a fatal stab in the back was finally given by Nietzsche, who declared that the exercise of the will-to-power is the apex of (his) human aspirations.

⁹ In Aristotle, truly virtuous actions must meet three conditions: (a) they are pursued knowingly, (b) they are chosen for their own sake, and (c) they are chosen according to a stable disposition (not at a whim, or in any way that the acting person might easily change one’s choice). These are “intellectual” conditions.

The *glorious* discovery presented in this paper is that *free* human beings have a “natural,” innate knowledge of the virtues, which can be taught and discussed but not imposed from the outside.

Freedom does not occur spontaneously; morality does not occur spontaneously. Since the only way to allow people to act virtuously in society is by rulers passing good laws and citizens obeying them, Aristotle and Aquinas called the virtue that relates to the common good “legal justice.” Here we restrict our view to justice exclusively as a virtue—a human virtue, a personal virtue, not a social or legal virtue: a self-selected, freely selected act rather than an imposition from society. And yet, society is an automatic recipient of the benefits of morality.

this requirement of the intellect—has been a major factor that has led to the destruction of the moral project. As we shall see, this destruction is the ultimate source of the widespread *support of immorality* that exists in the modern society.

We can assuredly proceed in our challenging project of restoring morality to society because we shall define precisely what constitutes immorality.¹⁰ And we shall strenuously refrain from casting the first stone, from determining who the immoral person is. We shall leave to the individual person to determine who the immoral person is.

One more specification. Our primary concern is not with individual salvation (especially if salvation is restricted to the afterlife)—for which, if it should happen, the reader should be grateful to himself or herself. The goal is general, community salvation—in this life.¹¹

There is so much misinformation about morality in the modern world that the public is utterly confused; we are utterly confused. And we reject its analysis. Ethics, as polite disquisitions about mores, yes. Morality, no. The damage is incalculable, because people at any level of society tend to say and do anything they want, even when it turns out to their own detriment. Truth is, such societies made up of such people are ungovernable. Unless people change their ways, such societies will dissolve (and they are not worth the effort to keep them together)—as they were dissolved in the past. The only question is, how much violence will accompany the process of dissolution?

All this is the beginning, not the end of the intellectual struggle for morality, a struggle that, after identifying some of the sworn enemies of morality, can be organized under three headings: I. We do not even know the number of the virtues any longer; II. We certainly do not know the functions that each virtue performs; and III. Conclusively, we do not understand the reasons for the universal (?)¹² condemnation of vices.

¹⁰ The preliminary question to ask is not, what is immorality? But why does immorality persist in the world? Huge topic, of course, deserving extensive treatment. The problem is mental. The problem is that once we commit an act that is immoral, rather than accepting the guilt, repenting, and promising not to fall again—a long and painful process—we build a short cut. We convince ourselves that the act was NOT immoral. We build a rationalization for our error; actually, we build a long chain of rationalizations.

¹¹ Can community salvation be speeded up through a process of redemption of the bully? See, Gorga (2018).

¹² Although reading very little in sociology and anthropology, yet the sparse reading seems to confirm that basic moral values, as defined in this work, are appreciated by every human being all over the world. Strong

Who are the sworn enemies of morality? They are (practitioners of) mental attitudes that shut the conversation as soon as the word morality is mentioned. Who are they? How right are they?

A SHORT LIST OF SWORN ENEMIES

Morality has to assert itself amidst powerful sworn enemies. Morality has many enemies. Ethics is perhaps the worst.¹³ Ethics is a practice devoid of theory; ethics is indeed a polite negation of morality. Rather than being engaged in the long-term project of restoration of morality, ethics finds short-term patches for whatever is wrong in society. Hence, under the guise of offering solutions, ethics is a powerful contributor to the demise of morality. "We have tried our best. Haven't we? So, relax and hope for the best." The best never comes by itself. Yes, the pursuit of ethics leaves us exhausted; it gives us the justification for not pursuing morality.

Cynicism comes soon after.¹⁴ Cynicism and subtle philosophical reasoning¹⁵ have cast so many doubts on the possibility of moral action that the discussion of

confirmation is obtained by the universal struggle against corruption. See *e.g.*, Udombana (2003). For a detailed study, see [Subhi A. Jarwan, Niam A. Fawaz, Saad A. Hammad](#), 2020. For the continuing concern about corruption over time, see *e.g.*, Confucius (*Analects*, Book XIII, verses 4-7), if you want to corrupt the people, corrupt their language first. Conversely, for the growing importance of ethical considerations in business, see work of Sharma (e. g., 2013).

¹³ Needless to say, ethics today is a far cry from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* or—just because embedded in theology—the *Moral Philosophy* of Thomas Aquinas or the *Moral Theology* of Alphonsus de Liguori, a Neapolitan theologian, who believed that "penitents should be treated as souls to be saved rather than as criminals to be punished."

¹⁴ Cynics believe they are "realists." One negation of this proposition is addressed in Gorga (2017b). In general, cynicism is a sticky affliction of the soul that shows self-adoration and envy of other people's ideas in equal parts; it is intellectual churning, often bright and witty; it is a bleak vision of the world born out of despair rooted in an unwillingness to move a finger to improve the human condition. Some cynics do have their vain pet projects.

¹⁵ For a large number of reasons, the first victim of too subtle philosophical reasoning has been philosophy itself: from love of wisdom, it has degenerated into love of words. Analytic philosophy has been concerned with the impossible task of understanding individual words. The current return to Kant and Hegel does not offer a new synthesis. With his obscure, pompous, tortured sentences advancing mostly impervious personal ideas, Immanuel Kant (see, esp. *The Critique of Practical Reason*), frightened any sane person from entering the discourse on morality. Professional philosophers, of course, live under different obligations.

morality is largely confined to the field of sexual activity.¹⁶ Killers are cheap rationalizations such as “they all do it” or “if I don’t do it others will.” These rationalizations are real killers of morality: they attempt to cover up the damage done to one’s character (if not to one’s soul).

Other rationalizations? I am a small peg; my part does not have any effect on the whole wide world. This is pragmatism, this is realism in action.

Worse, much worse. Just like economics, morality confined to the observation of practices concerning the isolated individual or confined to the issuance of directives for the isolated individual is sheer empty loquacity and verbosity.

A brief word must be spent on the huge hiatus between subtle philosophical reasoning and the virtual disappearance of morality from the current discourse. The hiatus can be filled, not with a recall of the long search for the Kantian “Categorical Imperative (CI),” but with a fast treatment of the essence of this conception. Clearly, the CI is an intellectual construct open to the many-sided attacks to which any such construct usually is. Were it found and widely agreed upon, would it not be a stranglehold on human activity? Would it not direct human beings’ activity the same way a tree or a stone is guided by its inner nature? CI is the peak of deontology, but deontology is dispersed among many rivulets. Well, remaining with this metaphor a little longer, squeezing truth out of deontology is like squeezing water that happens to fall in our hands.¹⁷

In addition to the deadweight of the CI and the traditional corrosive function of cynicism, we need to uncover the overwhelming influence that two—unsuspected—most sacred cows of our age have on the absence of morality: Science and Freedom. To make things rather unapproachable, in addition to *political* freedom, freedom is generally presented in the guise of freedom of *conscience* and freedom of *religion*. Is morality going to impose its will on our

¹⁶ An observation *too big* to be really considered in this text is this: Pace Jansenists and all those who support a very strict morality, original sin has nothing to do with sex; all to do with disobedience! Here we can only confine our vision onto more pedestrian issues. The restriction of morality to sexual activity has created two opposing social forces: Those who believe in “more” sex v. those who believe in “no” sex, or at last no sex before marriage. One has contributed to the desacralization of sex—no, the desacralization of life. The other has put morality in a sex cage. It is not sex that is holy; it is the other person I am making love with who is holy; it is the two persons making love who are holy.

¹⁷ Pithy, oh pithy! Rather than going overboard, why did Kant not use his powerful intellect to defeat “utilitarianism” once and for all?

political freedom? On our freedom of conscience? On our religious freedom?

Before we touch upon these topics, we have to put in discussion another major obstacle. For many good reasons we seem to live under the unspoken assumption that morality is supposed to be something to be practiced ultimately for the benefit of “others.” This suspicion can only be dealt with by realizing that this is a very restrictive understanding of the field over which morality reigns: We believe that morality is exhausted after dealing with the accepted topic of “Do not do harm to others.” Not so. As dealt with elsewhere, Gorga (2012), two more fields are indispensable today: Do not do harm to yourself; Do not allow others to do harm to you.¹⁸

THE GREATEST ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE MODERN AGE

A superficial reading of the last 500 years of history leads to the conclusion that the greatest achievements of humankind, the supreme achievements of the modern age—in addition to the emoluments bestowed upon us by Science and Technology—are the three freedoms: political freedom, freedom of conscience, and freedom of religion. We are very proud of all three freedoms.

It is almost as if we could individually claim them as our very own personal achievements; it is as if we could appropriate for ourselves the cumulative reasons for the greatness of Martin Luther, and Descartes, and Locke, and Hume, and Voltaire—and all other iconic figures of the modern age.

This is not a claim to be accepted or rejected lightly.

A Contrary View

It is the considered opinion of this writer that, leaving Science aside for the moment, rather than greatest achievements, these are the greatest calamities that might have befallen humanity during the last 500 years. As Shakespeare, a hidden Catholic,¹⁹ was deeply aware of its effect, a free conscience, an undisciplined conscience, an uninstructed conscience is a deeply *tormented* conscience: To be, or not to be: *Hamlet*.²⁰

¹⁸ “Others” is purposefully left undefined so to include not only people but also institutions.

¹⁹ See, e.g., Fr. Dwight Longenecker (2018).

²⁰ The working shorthand for this crisis is “deaths of despair,” a resonant phrase conjured by the economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton to describe the sudden rise in deaths from suicide, alcohol and drug abuse

Is not self-inflicted torture, rather than freedom, the singular characteristic of the modern age? Is there any other reason for the unceasing succession of psychological depressions, economic depressions, and wars that has dominated our modern life?

Well, a short-hand explanation is this: in the name of *freedom* we have rejected the guidance that morality can uniquely offer us.

The topic, evidently, is so vast that it cannot be treated in a single paper. Therefore, it will be addressed here by indirection. Rather than facing the deformities of our age head-on, we shall try to recollect how much sane and sound society was—and can still be—when morality ruled the world of culture. (Not that society was perfect.) Stated otherwise, our thesis is that *during the last 500 years we have misunderstood the meaning and function of morality*. Nay. We have misunderstood headstrong ideas that, whether consciously or not—often surreptitiously, at times rather loudly—support our *rejection* of morality.

Our understanding of science, reinforced by the prevailing understanding of freedom, are two conceptions that, especially combined, more than anything else make us prefer to talk of ethics rather than morality.

SCIENCE AND MORALITY

With selection of concrete measurable things as its proper field of study, science has left many casualties on its wake: the soul was the first to go and then religion with the associated rich culture of entities, from God to the afterlife. One more casualty was morality. The essential characteristic of morality is its teaching that you do good for its own sake, not because you expect a reward in return. How can we ever measure "good for its own sake"?

The functions that morality performs in society did not disappear. They were performed by an entity that was eventually identified as moralism. The differences in approach and results are better pinpointed through solutions proposed for the "free rider" problem. The free rider is the person who wants to obtain something for nothing; the moralist assumes a moral duty to go to any extreme to curb the free rider problem.

These clearly are judgment calls: who is the free rider? What is the nature of the infraction? The free rider thus becomes the “other,” whether the Jew or the Black or the Brown or the shopkeeper who overcharges. the farmer who—rather than being inefficient—overproduces, the fisherman who overfishes.

Under the regimen of morality, the free rider problem is tolerated as being a small problem; and should it become large, society deals with it through a variety of penalties that go from shame to isolation and ostracism.

Under the compulsion to build a more perfect society, the moralist cannot tolerate the infractions perpetrated by the free rider. Unable to rely on natural trust for the other and innate goodness of people, since it assumes that man naturally acts *as wolf to man*, to deal with the problem of the free rider the moralist has to call upon the power of a monster: the state, the Leviathan. The harsher the penalties, the louder the applause of the moralist. It is thus that the Gulag is created and tolerated by society at large. You can get on a high horse, even the high horse of morality, and take upon yourself the task of resolving the problem of the free rider. You can get on a high horse and conclude that you really need to – and you will, if you have your druthers – change human nature. Out of non-cheaters, you will create the ”new man.”

These are the unavoidable paths that are taken when love is abandoned, and hate takes over. Love is the highest of the virtues; hate is the lowest of the vices. This is how the Gulag takes over. This is how the bully controls society.

To insist upon the point, the deep overriding cultural reason that prevents a modern cultivation of morality is the fact that one can *measure* neither morality nor its effects. Many people, way too many influential people fight even the idea of morality, because there is no way to measure morality; hence, they believe, morality cannot be proved or disproved through a set of “scientific” investigations, and therefore one “should” not give any allegiance to it.

Utilitarianism attempted to measure morality and its effects, but economists *failed to find* the “util” as a standard of measurement, and the slogan of Utilitarianism, “greatest good for the greatest number,” has turned out to be an undelivered and undeliverable promise, a slogan really. The issue is terribly complex, not only because morality does not submit itself to measurement, but because morality offers no other reward for doing good and avoiding evil actions

except for the certainty of self-esteem. This is the *quid pro quo* that morality offers.²¹ Since self-esteem is a quality that cannot be measured, consideration of morality is avoided in scientific circles.

Is this entire construction tenable in a civilized society?

Two observations undermine the very foundation for the disparagement that science reserves for morality. First, and most fundamentally, there is the arrogance of a science that does not know its own limits. As demonstrated elsewhere, Gorga (2010), science itself, as can be clearly seen in mathematics, covers only one third of its realm as *potentially* subject to measurements: the length, the width, the height of any measurable thing is expressed by all negative and all positive digits. *Neither zero nor infinity*, **the other two inseparable components of mathematics, are measurable entities.** This is not a characteristic to be taken lightly. As we shall see in a moment, there is an even deeper relationship between science and morality. Science itself is a “virtue” that starts with measurements and leads to something unmeasurable. Science leads to understanding.

Ultimately, there is an even greater imponderable here: knowledge. Knowledge is not a virtue; knowledge is the fruit of science.

The second observation is this. Once an imperfect understanding of science deprived us of the use of morality, human beings descended into moralism.

Moralism and the Free Rider Problem

Having deprived themselves of morality, scientists—with social scientists at the head of the parade—have descended into moralism. They have created the “free rider problem” out of a whole cloth. They are dead set against anyone who should ever attempt to get something for nothing, the definition of the free rider. And they have plenty to offer for the commission of *this* “immorality.”

Surely the temptation of getting something for nothing is congenital to nearly all of us. This is an eminent moral problem. Society found ways of dealing with it for millions of years. Came science, with its propensity to destroy anything in its wake that cannot be measured, morality was felled as no longer worth

²¹ Society automatically concurs in this judgement. Indeed, morality is never a personal issue; it is always a deeply social issue. It involves the interaction between at least two people. What is the reward that society offers for the moral action? An ancient word fallen in disuse is best to express the approval that society reserves for the moral action: approbation. And, of course, approbation is not a measurable entity.

discussing. Moralism, *fake* morality, took over.

With moralism (and naturalism) in the saddle, man is supposed to be “wolf” to man. How to control natural negative forms of human behavior? How to control the Free Rider? Social scientists make their wishes known in a forceful way. They rely mainly on the fear engendered by the menace of life-threatening penalties, penalties imposed with overwhelming force. It is only the overwhelming power of the State that is assumed to be capable of disposing of the free rider problem. Issues that are treated here in the abstract have elsewhere been treated in some detail, Gorga (2023: 113-123). The result of that analysis has been the identification of three major victims: the family fisherman; the family farmer; and the independent retailer. All three “institutions” have been largely destroyed after being labelled as free riders.

The General Case

Let us remain on the general case a little longer. Once morality disappears, moralism takes over. With morality, one argues with an opponent. Reality determines who “wins” the argument. Not so with moralism. The “moralist” must win, and to win the final outcome is recourse to the overwhelming power of the State.

It is thus that the State, the Leviathan, must be idealized and it has been idealized—by Hegel, primarily, but not exclusively—during the last three or four hundred years; it is thus that the door was opened to the statist horrors of the French, the Fascist, the Nazi, the Soviet, and the Mao Revolutions—let alone the plethora of “minor” revolutions that have not risen to the stature of having acquired a recognizable proper name.

The mantel of moralism serves to insulate the victim, whereby any passersby, if they even see the victim, tacitly or explicitly declare that s/he “must” deserve whatever punishment is being meted out. Hence the “atomism” of the modern world. The insulation serves two other intertwined major purposes: First of all, it serves to reduce the effectiveness of rebellion by the victims to a minimum; isolation also serves to allow the victimizer to rise above all criticism. Whatever action he or she takes is automatically justified. More unjust the action, more pain is inflicted upon the victim; more powerful the victimizer become.

How can such a clearly indefensible action be tolerated in a modern society,

a society that yearns to be just; a society that assumes to be the most advanced ever in “social progress”? The answer is all there in plain sight, in a Catch-22 of gargantuan proportions. The immoralist is a do-gooder. The harder he punishes the free rider, the more good he assumes to do for society.

THE ABSOLUTE SUPREMACY OF MORALITY IN HUMAN AFFAIRS

It is this lie, it is this cover-up that reveals the absolute supremacy of morality in human affairs. The evil person who commits an evil act does not have the courage to proclaim to the four winds that he or she is proud to commit an evil act. No, the evil act has to be covered up with a lie.

Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin did they ever proclaim the atrocities they were committing? No. They and their sycophant supporters inundated us with the sound of the good they were doing: the trains were running on time, the glory of the nation was restored, the capitalists were no longer to perform their atrocities.

Worse, of course. Anyone who would not accept their lies had to be suppressed.

This is a generalized condition. It is a presupposition that blinds us to **any** negative effects that fall out of our selected policies. The population of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was destroyed? Well, the life of many soldiers was preserved. We had to destroy the town to save it for democracy, did we not? Babies die, because of fluoridation of municipal water supply? Well, look at how many dental cavities this policy prevents.

The Ultimate Danger

Why should there be a victim at all? The profound reason is that the moral action is not easy to take; it is the most arduous road we take. That is why the reward is so high: the person has self-esteem; society is happy and satisfied of all its needs—and offers approbation.

That is why *in an unjust society* the moral person **must** be punished; how does the individual person dare to act morally and show self-esteem? The unjust society, the autocratic society, cannot tolerate that show of independence. Subduing the freedom of others is the goal.

Apart from the incessant successions of autocratic governments, this general extreme is yet to be reached. And let us hope that this condition will never come

to pass as a general condition of humanity.

Ah, Let me Count the Ways

Lest I be accused of a myopic and biased view of modern society, let me count some of its astonishing accomplishments: medicines, surgery (!), transportation, communication, exploration, invincible curiosity. And an enormous potential for good: if we put our minds to it, we can eliminate the scourge of famine and homelessness in a few short years.

MORALITY AND FREEDOM

The relationship between morality and freedom has become inscrutable. Freedom is the supreme value of the modern world. Nothing survives in the wake of the assertion of “freedom” by the modern man. It is an irresistible force. Morality is the primary victim of freedom. It goes without saying—literally, without saying—that some people fight even the idea of morality itself, because they believe morality *restricts* their freedom.

First, a reality check about two easiest *negative* cases. What is precisely freedom of conscience and freedom of religion? Are these conceptions not often translated as freedom *from* conscience and freedom *from* religion?²² As such, they are perversions of no interest to this paper.²³

From these two specific cases it takes one step to jump to another general case. The relationship between freedom and morality has been turned on its head during the last five hundred years. As pointed out in Gorga (2017), Martin Luther assumed he was freeing humankind from the authority of the Catholic Church. He succeeded in that, but the end result has been to axiomatically transform *moral*

²² In the United States there is a foundation named Freedom From Religion. A short account of this tortuous road is this: Once Descartes and the Rationalists determined that only measurable entities were worth analyzing and discussing, the soul disappeared from sight. Thus, was freedom of conscience acquired. Men and women became only minds, Martians, really. And the pressures of the heart were relegated to the realm of the feminine. An unknown, obscure territory, too close at hand to really explore. Freedom from conscience was acquired in one fell swoop.

²³ One quick note must be added. Some people become atheists because they cannot resolve the conundrum of why God permits evil. They even conceive of the possibility that God, if he exists, is *not* good. They have not thought the issue out: If God did not permit evil, God would have denied us freedom, the freedom to do evil even.

freedom into **political** freedom.

And what is political freedom? Undoubtedly, the few are arrogating to themselves the political freedom to bestride our political—and economic—world. They are the libertines. As Adam Smith, one of the least suspected people, cried out, *“All for ourselves and nothing for other people, seems, in every age of the world, to have been the vile maxim of the masters of mankind.”* No, economic inequality is not an isolated *economic* phenomenon. It is a moral problem: We are all aware that the coffers of the Masters of Mankind are filled with millions of dollars, millions of rubles, millions of renminbi, while too many hoi polloi are left hungry and homeless. This is indeed a primary consequence of political freedom.²⁴

In plain fact, today the rest of the population is left with the political freedom to lower a lever to elect ever so often people who are not known and cannot possibly be known. What is the ultimate—surprising—result of *this* political freedom if not making us all dependent on the *opinion(s)* of **others** whom we do not know and cannot possibly know?²⁵ This is not freedom; it is, indeed, political slavery. Unawares, we have fallen into this condition of slavery to the opinion of others, the opinion of the majority of people who pull the electoral lever ever so often without much understanding of the issues or knowing the candidates that well.

This is not at all an implicit condemnation of democracy. Democracy is, indeed, the major victory of the last five hundred years. But democracy calls for sovereign citizens, informed citizens, self-governing citizens, free citizens, economically independent citizens. How can anyone govern others well, or at least direct others toward the good government, if unable to govern himself or herself well? Democracy is a political system that is strenuously striving to be born in our modern age. Democracy is not a mob; it is not any one unchecked source of power. As John Adams well knew, “It is in vain to say that democracy is less vain, less proud, less selfish, less ambitious, or less avaricious than aristocracy or

²⁴ A longer discourse on this issue carried out all through my work makes us realize that the solution to this moral problem is not to take back the toys we have given to the kids. The solution from now on is to give to the kids no more than they earn. The solution is not re-distribution of wealth, that is social justice; but fair, indeed just, distribution of wealth among the creators of wealth. That is economic justice.

²⁵ This topic is more extensively treated in Gorga (2016).

monarchy.”²⁶ Hence the checks and balances in the United States Constitution. Its sporadic, often temporary, often illusory victories have to be constantly attributed to a sovereignty that is exercised by a *free* and educated electorate. We have a long way to go on the road to democracy, and the first step starts with the moral action. Hence this paper, a paper that is trying to extricate morality from its mortal enemies before it can freely tackle its subject matter. Indeed, the very reason for this paper is the realization that it is *only* the exercise of morality that will eventually grant us true political freedom, and freedom *of* religion, and freedom *of* conscience as well—without ever attempting to grapple with the question as to whether humanity has ever enjoyed these blessings in the past. Waiting for that day to come, what do we notice today?

THE FREEDOM OF IMMORALITY

It is hard to escape the conclusion that morality is so negated today because its absence offers a forbidden fruit: the freedom of immorality.

Immorality is rampant today. More than ever? Less than ever? The question is irrelevant. Indeed, not that immorality has ever been absent from any era in the past. And perhaps, it is only a Pollyannaish attitude that should make us suspect—or hope—that there will ever be a society in the future that will be immune from immorality—even a little bit; even for only a fleeting moment.²⁷

What is immorality? The answer is Lapalissian: Immorality is that condition in which human beings do not love themselves, do not love others, do not love

²⁶ https://www.dailysignal.com/2019/08/29/heres-why-we-arent-and-never-should-be-a-pure-democracy/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=heres-why-we-arent-and-never-should-be-a-pure-democracy&mkt_tok=eyJpIjoiTW1ObE5HVmxOVipoTURNelIsInQiOjIjFOQBwZThZM1oxY3locko4U2swOGhsRndjVFpsMDlxOVZpaStpXCqldkZvczVVSoxoTUZERDdFaFVzTjVIQxBNk1tN2l4dHl5SGFIMExodFMwZDB2Y1wvOEjWTIRjZlwvYo4ySnFSSVdCUnFPVm9JcVBKeTNUSnI4YldXbmNwQWdcL24ifQ%3D%3D

²⁷ To turn things around, if we were not free to commit immoral actions, we would be less than human.

God,²⁸ our Father, our Creator.²⁹

These are hard standards, but very broad. Yet, since the action that we want to characterize is infinite, since it must necessarily encompass all present, past, and future action, these standards cannot be other than broad. No description will ever encompass them all. If the aim of morality is not to satisfy some vainglorious attempt to cover all possible occurrences but to aid in the performance of future acts and direct them toward the moral action, the standards described above ought to be considered more than sufficient guides to action.

Judged against these standards, must we not say that greed is not good, because greed is a vice? Hence, Neoliberalism is not good, because it is built on greed. And Socialism is not good, because Socialism is built on envy—another vice.³⁰

Is not gross inequality built on people starving to death immoral? Is not racism immoral? Indeed, is not white and black racism immoral? Is not white supremacy immoral? And the exploitation of workers, is it not immoral? Or is the exploitation of women moral? Or the exploitation of children?

But we can be a little bit more specific: A society that cannot stand up to [the bully](#), is a society that lacks the basic virtue of courage. This is an immoral society.

But society is **not** an abstraction. Society is an aggregation of individual human beings. Members of a society who do not act courageously are acting immorally.

This is a personal litany. A society that cannot stand up to a president who is a bully is an immoral society. A society that cannot stand up to legislators who act as bullies is an immoral society. A society that cannot make corporations—and governments—serve the needs of human beings is an immoral society.

²⁸ The reduction of the Mosaic Commandments to these three commands was operated by Jesus. For this writer Jesus is God, and just because he was God, he was able to operate this and another major syntheses about hoarding. See, Concordian economics. Still, the temptation here is to suggest that Jesus operated this synthesis *as a man*. It is so logical; the case presents such a logical progression.

²⁹ Those who deny the existence of God have the duty to themselves, and to others to go beyond the changing explanations concerning the structure of evolution. Rather than believing in a long succession of miracles, is it not much saner to believe in only one Miracle/Mystery?

³⁰ This writer can honestly point out these deficiencies, because he has been steadily working on the alternative of Somism in sociology and Concordianism in political science.

society that cannot control pornography and firearms is an immoral society. A society that tolerates any theft is an immoral society. A personal picadillo: A society that tolerates the theft of such a sacred word as *marriage* is an immoral society. Allow me to be specific. Provided they were born that way,³¹ I have nothing against gay men or women. I love them; but just because I love them, I believe that if they were to stop **stealing** such a sacred word as marriage, they might eventually gain more support in society. They are such creative people. Why can't they create the word that meets their specifications? It is simply ridiculous to call "wife" a man who is loved by another man or "husband" a woman who is loved by another woman. I still remember the photo of such a husband: she was dressed in long tails; she looked more like a penguin than a man to me.

On euthanasia, I have only one question: Do people forget the endomorphins as God's last gift to humans?

And then there is the most painful condition of a modern society: abortion. A moral act is a personal act: we cannot, and we must not judge the woman and the man who go through the painful experience of an abortion. We can only specify that abortion is not a "right;" childbirth is a **duty**—and as such it expels any extraneous intervenor as politicians and the state.

On the other hand we can fully understand the resistance of people who are against abortion and then are *compelled* by society to pay for other people's abortions. This is not a virulent conflict that can be resolved on the abstract terrain of "morality." It can be faced head-on only on the firm terrain of economics. Let individual people pay for abortions. Let men and women be so rich as to pay for abortions, if their conscience tolerates abortion.

This is not an Impossible Dream. This is the function of Concordian economics. The function of Concordian economics is to create financial independence for everyone.

A Not So Strange Complaint

While observing the modern "culture" of immorality, one can hardly avoid the realization that one of the major reasons why both morality *and* religion are

³¹ The whole gamut of feelings is raised in me towards those who were not born that way.

shunted aside today is because people notice a strong association between them. There is hardly a religious text that does not condemn immorality. Is this a good reason to shunt morality aside, or religion aside? The very question invites the recognition of how preposterous this condition is. Indeed, rather than joining the complainants, this writer opts to be thankful to religious texts for helping him along to discern right from wrong—it is indifferent to this writer whether these texts were inspired by God or not; he finds plenty of illumination in “secular” texts as well. In Croce, an avowed atheist, for instance.

Soon after comes the intellectual obligation to acknowledge the provenance of ideas. So, definitely, the above definition of immorality is (hopefully) a fair representation of the essence of the Biblical Commandments.³² And I need to stop here.

Rather than analyzing the enormous substratum of cultural, social, economic, legal, and political reality on which the forbidden fruit of immorality rests, we are going to casts some light on the major fruit of *morality*.

FROM “THEIR” FREEDOM TO OUR FREEDOM

Within this multiplicity of intersecting positions, freedom has become an absolute value—as such it is untouchable.³³ Yes, freedom is indeed absolute. Either we are all free or we are all slaves.³⁴ Today, “they” have all the freedom in the world. At least they *think* they have all the freedom in the world. And where do they live? In gated communities.

³² Any act, not only acts of sexuality, homosexuality, and even the commission of abortion, as all other human interactions, are expressions of morality or immorality. My Church—any church—can and must guide us; but it cannot enforce her will through recourse to the state. My Church’s task is to help human beings distinguish between morality and immorality. The individual conscience must rule. Otherwise, the very constitutional essence of morality is destroyed—and my Church ought not to participate in this destruction. History yells this truth. The present anguish of the people roars this truth. Did not Jesus say (Matthew 15:19), “For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.” If we want to fight these evils, it is the heart that we need to purify. We can purify the heart only with love, not with hate. Calls for state punishment are cowardly expressions of hate. This action is reciprocated by the opposing view that forces the public to pay for abortions. This specific tug of war will end only when a woman becomes wealthy enough to pay for an abortion, if she wants one.

³³ Freedom becomes an absolute value especially when it is assumed that economic and political freedom exist only for the few.

³⁴ Within the realm of economic justice, we will all be free. The Masters of Mankind will not lose any of their rights; they will only share economic rights with everyone else. What they will lose are privileges that ultimately do not even turn out to their own best interests.

A freedom limited to “the few” is not freedom at all. It is a freedom shouted from the rooftops; it is a perversion of freedom. The Master *was* a Slave—a slave, to say the least, a slave to wrong ideas. The Masters of Mankind today are slaves to what has become an empty idol: Money. The more wrong an idea, the more we are attached to it. This is the power of wrong ideas.

How to get out of this abyss?

The open secret can be found precisely in *our* freedom—as applied in our free will. The work of reconstruction starts by realizing that any action is either moral or it is not: A little bit of immorality is just that, a little bit of *immorality*. It carries with it the danger of setting us on the sliding slope of greater infractions. We are of course free to stop at any time; above all, we must realize that after immorality comes the possibility of repentance³⁵ and the whole panoply of psychological and pharmacological aids to assist in turning one’s life toward “normal” and positive goals.³⁶ But repentance is achieved at great psychological cost. Would it not be better to pursue the moral action at first trial?

The choice does not come easy. There are too many countervailing forces in life whereby we can say that, unless trained, we shall fail. Once trained, however, by others or by ourselves,³⁷ the moral action will be the only choice we will ever make—and then the living will be easy.

MORAL FREEDOM AS THE FRUIT OF MORALITY

What is the fruit of morality? The fruit of morality is *moral* freedom, *total* freedom of the individual person: Freedom of the *will*, freedom from customs and habits that are deleterious to our physical wellbeing; freedom of the *intellect*, freedom

³⁵ Repentance is a vital part of life. It is fully regenerative. If memory serves, there is an important essay by Fr. Thomas Merton in which he pointed out how the Nazi acquired complete dominance of people’s lives by convincing them that, after they had committed even a minor sin, they were doomed forever. There was no repentance.

³⁶ This might be an appropriate moment to advertise a personal experience. This writer used to smoke three packs of cigarettes per day; for many years he desperately tried to stop; he often succeeded for a week or a month. At one of these stops, he received another paper rejection letter. While physically turning on his heels to go to buy cigarettes, he asked himself a question: “Will smoking change that message?” The answer was a clear, No. He heard a click as if a switch had been turned in his brain. After that he has never had any urge at all to smoke. That “no” was a clear, conscious manifestation of the will—honed by many such exercises. Can that switch be found?

³⁷ The delightful description of how Benjamin Franklin trained himself in the virtues is a must read.

from the slavery to fads and ideologies; freedom of the *heart*, freedom from slavery to the passions of the moment. Nay, moral freedom is also visceral freedom; it is freedom from hidden strings—fears and daemons and imaginings created deep in our psyche by so many forces; it is aesthetic freedom, freedom of our imagination, freedom to experience a Stendhal Syndrome.³⁸ Moral freedom is total freedom; freedom of the total person.

Freedom to forgive, not seven times, but seventy-seven times—indeed.

Freedom from hate.

Freedom to love.

Freedom to love ourselves. Freedom to love our body—whether tall or short; fat or thin; beautiful or ugly (there is no naturally ugly person). Freedom to love our will. Freedom to love our mind. Freedom to love our heart.

Freedom to love our neighbor—whether Christian, or Jewish, or Muslin, or professant of any religion or philosophy; whether professant of no religion or philosophy; whether well-mannered or ill-mannered; whether cultured or uncultured; whether White, or Black, or Brown, or Yellow, or Red. What is this skin-deep classification of human beings?

Freedom to love Nature and Evolution; and, if you try, even to love God—whatever conception you have of God.

Morality, not ethics, is that important.

Without morality we cannot overcome militarism.

Without morality we cannot overcome economic hegemonism.

Without morality we cannot overcome the vain hopes about capital punishment.

The result of the moral action is *to empower the individual human being as no other action can*: Neither the acquisition of riches nor the acquisition of political power can do that. The exercise of morality yields moral freedom.

It was moral freedom that allowed this writer's great-grandfather, a Carbonaro, to ask for one more lash “for his pleasure” after having received one hundred lashes on his bare back by the order of tyrannical authorities; it was moral freedom that sent Mazzini and Garibaldi into exile; it was moral freedom that sent Thoreau and Mahatma Gandhi to jail; it was moral freedom that

³⁸ See, Smee (2019).

allowed Mandela to survive 10 years of jail; it was moral freedom that gave Solzhenitsyn the strength to confront the Gulag; it was moral freedom that allowed the iconic Chinese to face armored tanks in Tiananmen Square; it was moral freedom that allowed E. Jean Carroll to sue such a powerful person as Donald Trump, while president of the United States, and win her case; it is moral freedom that gives an increasing number of millions of people the sense of responsibility to go to the streets to join a “singing” revolution, a “pots and pans” revolution, a “shouting Moscow Mitch” demonstration.

HOW DO WE ACHIEVE MORAL FREEDOM? WHEN?

We achieve moral freedom through the exercise of the virtues. That is why it is so important to be virtuous. No matter how difficult the effort, which is the only way to acquire power—and freedom. As St. Thomas Aquinas pointed out, the virtues are the “peak of power.” Human beings cannot be any more powerful—and freer—than by exercising the virtues. No church, no state, no party has power over us. We do not need anyone or anything to exercise the virtues.

Hope springs eternal. The present is always a good time to try to restore morality to the whole field of human action. If this is the right moment, we might succeed if we limit our scope to the following three aspects of the overall field: I. The number of the virtues³⁹; II. The functions that each virtue performs; and III. The reasons for the universal condemnation of vices.

I. NUMBER AND NAME OF THE VIRTUES

The virtuous person is a moral person. A fast test of the validity if this proposition is this. Turned inside out the proposition is also true: The moral person is a virtuous person.

Trouble is that we do not know either the name or the number of the virtues any longer. [Aristotle](#) named 12 of them; [Thomas Aquinas](#) 10; Dante built his

³⁹ The fundamental reason why this paper proposes the establishment of a virtue-based morality is that the virtues seem to incorporate the wisdom of the ages; they were likely understood and practiced much before the written word was ever created. This is a fact that lends credence to the unchangeability of human nature, the immutability of human needs.

Divine Comedy just by giving “the story” of each virtue—and corresponding vice.⁴⁰ Over time, this unity of conception was dissolved. While Adam Smith reduced the number of virtues to one, prudence⁴¹; hence, self-interest and prevalent attention to savings and profit. Later writers multiplied their number. A contemporary “[Master List](#)” compiled by Lion Goodman lists “more” than 650 virtues—and “more” than 350 vices. Whether consciously or not, Alasdair MacIntyre showed utter despair about the presence of the virtues in the modern world. He wrote an entire book called *After Virtue* (1981).

With a very simple mind, this writer has a hard time even recalling the names of the four cardinal virtues, the three intellectual virtues, and the three theological virtues.⁴² So, he prefers to stick with the basics. Here they are.

There are four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance; three intellectual virtues: wisdom, science, and understanding; and three theological virtues: hope, faith, and love.

The first group is composed of “cardinal” virtues; they are the pivot around which every human action is built. The second group is composed of “intellectual” virtues; they are the pivot around which our intellectual life is built. The third group is composed of “theological” virtues; they are the pivot around which our spiritual life is built.

Some readers might want to notice at this point a correlation with the equivalence of body, mind, and spirit that comprises the human person in its entirety. This correlation helps us understand the deeper meaning and deeper function of the virtues.

II. MEANING AND FUNCTIONS OF THE VIRTUES

The cardinal virtues are rooted into the human will and help to guide us in the daily actions and needs of our bodies—which is the “base” on which our intellectual and spiritual life is built.

⁴⁰ Dante did not explicitly deal with the three intellectual virtues. He just enwrapped our lives into them. He said, “fatti non foste a viver come bruti ma per seguir virtute e conoscenza” (you were not made to live like brutes but to follow virtue and knowledge).

⁴¹ Adam Smith mentions also justice, benevolence, and self-command; but never economic justice.

⁴² Do people who do not believe in God lose the three theological virtues of hope, faith, and love? I trust, they do not. "My" God is so magnanimous as to offer his munificence to anyone who wants to partake of it.

Prudence. Human beings are a mystery; the Universe is a mystery; life is a mystery. All is a wonderful mystery that surrounds us, that envelops us, that constitutes the very bones of our existence. We can try to understand and appreciate life only by *prudently* lifting the veil of this mystery; only by gently lifting the veil a little bit at a time. And we see a rose; and we smell a rose. The smile of a kid. It is absolutely proper to ask for all the help that we can get at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of a new project. I never fail to consult with people who know more than I do, and I have been lucky enough to have constantly received help from some of the most exalted minds in their field. Some people might not believe it, but I have profs to have received help from my Custodian Angel when I needed it most. I never start the day, I never start a new project without asking for help from the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. My daily prayer ends by asking God to help me “love everyone and everything a little more every day.”

Justice. This is the virtue to which this writer has dedicated most attention in his life—with special attention to economic justice. Here only a syncretic expression will be used: Without economic justice, we cannot give or receive what is due to us; our very existence depends on the proper use of this virtue.

Courage. Life is tougher than generally appreciated. Without courage one cannot set foot out of bed in the morning. It takes courage (even) to love and to be loved.

Temperance is essential in everything; from Aristotle to the Buddha, all wise men and women have emphasized the essential function of this virtue. The lowest level of application of this virtue makes perhaps the need for its application clear as a (Buddhist) bell: Water is essential to life; but even too much water—let alone wine and liquor—makes us bloated to say the least. Brought to its highest level, one notices the same function: Love is essential to life; but too much love tends to blind and harm us and other people as well.

Conclusively, the cardinal virtues are an exercise of our will. Once we understand their meaning and their functions, we are capable of summoning this set of virtues and let them shape our character. No one else can do it for us.

Next come the **intellectual** virtues. The intellectual virtues stem from our discernment, our intense concentration on the requirements of the task at hand. In many quarters, this act of discernment is called prayer; in others, meditation;

and still others. research and study. Once we desire these virtues very ardently, they offer themselves to us. The most important is the function of wisdom⁴³; it coordinates all our life.⁴⁴

Wisdom is the ineffable ability to choose the right road.⁴⁵ Understanding follows. Understanding is the confirmation of having chosen the right road.

Science is the meat sandwiched between wisdom and understanding. Wisdom and understanding are very personal; no one can explain them; no one can inculcate them in others. But the meat in between, science, is fully explainable. So explainable that it is repeatable. To say the least, if one cannot explain it, one has no science under consideration.⁴⁶

Consciousness⁴⁷ (of our wisdom) and (consciousness of our) *understanding*, the beginning, and the end of our intellectual life, are terribly private and personal adventures. They are both unfathomable. They are both incommensurable.

No matter how much attention has been perennially devoted to it, some more intense scrutiny has to be given to the first intellectual virtue, wisdom. Wisdom gives us the ability to discern how much prudence, and justice, and courage, and temperance we need to exercise at any particular juncture of our lives. Without wisdom, we are lost in a haze, as Keynes put it in a different context, “a haze where nothing is clear and everything is possible.” Wisdom seems so broad, and so vague, that our mind hardly considers it a virtue—a habit—at all. Wisdom, among all virtues, is left all alone in a most desolate state. Hence, it has become one of the most obscure characteristics of men and women. We seem to reserve the word, whether consciously or not, only for mystics and saints. Whoever attaches this characteristic to politicians—or to economists—today? The thought

⁴³ Being a deeply religious person, I know that wisdom comes from only from God, not from me nor from you. The reader if, of course, free to believe otherwise. I find confirmation in:

“Indeed, though one be perfect among the sons of men,
if Wisdom, who comes from you, be not with him,
he shall be held in no esteem.” *Book of Wisdom* 9:6.

⁴⁴ Wisdom is the most mysterious of all virtues as well. The Ancient Israelites knew it: *Book of Wisdom* 7:26-27, “Wisdom is the refulgence of eternal light, the spotless mirror of the power of God, the image of his goodness. And she, who is one, can do all things, and renews everything while herself perduring; And passing into holy souls from age to age, she produces friends of God and prophets.”

⁴⁵ For an account of the understanding of wisdom by the best minds over the centuries, see Marzueani (nd).

⁴⁶ Once this writer discovered, on page 328 of the *General Theory*, that Keynes was unable to explain the relationship between saving and investment, he lost all respect for the author as a scientist.

⁴⁷ Consciousness or self-awareness of being thinking people is the first step in our intellectual life.

might even be attacked as generally too “idealistic” and “practically” unfeasible or even laughable. Yet, yet. Politicians and economists, and scientists, ought to make full use of this virtue most of all. This is the reason. Wisdom is acquired through perspective. In fact, the original meaning of the word is exactly that: an intense look⁴⁸ in one direction; not two directions at once, unless one wants to confuse oneself or others in the process. One perspective at a time. But one perspective offers knowledge of only what is in its purview. Once one has spilled all the knowledge possible that is offered through one perspective, the reverse perspective will either confirm or invalidate our conception. One example: The virtuous man is moral; the moral man is virtuous. Once that is done, we realize that we are in a tunnel. We are in a linear world. And the linear world is an abstraction. From a point, we proceed to the observation of a line; and that is too limiting a view. We have to distil our linear knowledge to one point!⁴⁹ In other words, we have to start our analysis again—and again. Until we satisfy ourselves that we are now expanding our knowledge of a point onto the knowledge of a sphere. And then the sphere has to become larger and larger. If we remain in the realm of physics, or economics, we make ourselves powerless. It is only philosophy first, then religion, then mysticism that yield a firm knowledge of this world, because then we do exclaim: “Wisdom of God, be with me, always at work in me.” This is the promise: “I will inspire you with wisdom which your adversaries will be unable to resist” (Luke 21:15). Why do so many people reject the entreaty of wisdom? The answer is long and cannot be adequately treated here. The answer has apparently something to do with God. People who reject God, often unawares and contrary to their best intentions perhaps, seem also to reject the entreaty of wisdom.

One more characteristic of wisdom. It is only through wisdom that we can be firmly cognizant of the limits of our human existence, including the limits of science. And what is the virtue of *science*? Science is the pursuit of truth — wherever it leads. Everyone should fully believe in the proposition that we must pursue truth wherever it leads. Truth is central to our existence; without it we

⁴⁸ Wisdom derives from a Tamil word related to eye and eyesight.

⁴⁹ Hegel put the issue in formal and complete ways; he analyzed not only traditional forms of complementarities, but especially antinomies, opposites and contradictions, through the process of [thesis, antithesis, and synthesis](#).

cannot achieve anything. We cannot live in the realm of justice; we cannot live in the realm of understanding; without truth, we cannot live (at least as thinking human beings, one must concede). Period.

But what is truth? We have lately been cowered by the expression that truth is relative. Yes, truth is indeed relative. If we were to achieve absolute truth, we would be God. Indeed, we would need nothing else: no fortitude, no science, no faith. Truth is relative, for sure. But relative to **what**? If we do not specify this “what,” we are lost in a sea of nothingness, in which we destroy even the meaning of “relative.” Yes, the truth is relative. Let us look at a couple of alternatives. Since this writer is a deeply religious person, he lives on easy street. For him, the truth is relative to God. Those who use the expression not-God as a pure nominal entity also have it easy. They can simply say that truth is relative to not-God. It would appear that the people who have really serious difficulties are the true atheists. For them, the way out might be found only at the end of a series of procedural agreements. We must agree that the pursuit of truth does not follow an arbitrary procedure. We must agree that the validity of the end product is not determined by the pursuer. We must agree that truth is always there. It lives its own objective reality. One might even consider the defeatist answer: There is no truth.

Through grammar, and philosophy, and practice, and decency, we have established long ago what “is” truth. Truth is not opinion. There is room for opinion, of course. We might even say that all truths start with an opinion. But truth is not some fickle changeable opinion. Rather, as we have seen in some detail in the appropriate context, there are some very stringent rules in this pursuit, rules that have been established during the course of the millennia. At the end of this road we might then all accept **at least** this statement: truth is relative to the system of logic and the theory of knowledge within which we operate. No more, no less.

Conclusively, as we have seen elsewhere, truth is a dialectic idea. Truth is true because it does not contain falsity. It is not fake. The supreme test of truth is that it *must* also be good and be beautiful.

When we approach the issues with the assistance of the virtues, we are surprised to discover not so much, as concluded above, that there are limits to science—this proposition is being more and more widely accepted today. When we use the entire

complement of virtues, we are really surprised by another unavoidable conclusion: the discovery that science does not necessarily lead to understanding!

Understanding is knowledge of the whole. By definition, the whole cannot be known. And yet, it can be understood.

It is in this precarious condition of human existence that hope, faith, and charity come to rescue us. As we have seen elsewhere, the equivalence of matter to energy and to spirit compels us to conclude that to understand the whole is to understand the spirit—the spirit of anything, be it the watch on my wrist or the universe in its entirety. When the issue of understanding of the spirit is put in these terms it becomes evident that—as yet, and perhaps forever—we have no objective rules to guide us in our quest of the understanding of the spirit. We have only a *personal*, experiential knowledge of it.

The whole, the spirit, reveals itself to us or, put the other way, we open ourselves to the spirit. In this quest, we are no longer guided by an objective, “scientific,” repeatable set of rules. We are only guided by the three **theological** virtues of hope, faith, and love. We *hope* we are on the right track, which means we must always be open to the possibility of being on the wrong track. But while we proceed, we must be steadfast. If we keep on looking continuously backward and sideways, we are at great disadvantage. Until proven otherwise, we must proceed with trust—with *faith*⁵⁰—that we are indeed on the

⁵⁰ As he acknowledged, Martin Luther had a vision of God, a personal experience of God, that transformed his life. The question is: Is that vision so true that it has to transform our lives as well? Let us see. Once he was physically touched by the grace of God, quite understandably, he saw God everywhere—even in the malfeasance of man. That vision his intellect, imbued with the idea of the supremacy of reason, revealed that this was a logical impossibility. God is not in the malfeasance of man. That was the beginning of the unraveling of his system. To deny that God is present even in the malfeasance of man, he had to deny the existence of free will. Thereafter, he asserted the doctrine of predestination. And then see his work titled “The Freedom of a Christian”—he had to take faith away from the context of all other virtues; thus Faith was made absolute, the alpha and the omega of religion. He concluded that faith in Jesus is all that is required for man’s salvation. St. Maximus the Confessor (580-662), born a thousand years before Luther, had it right. He said: “By itself faith accomplishes nothing. For even the devils believe and shudder.” See, <https://divineoffice.org>. Feb. 24, 2019. Thereafter, he found certainty in Scripture. He formed what might be perhaps the first redacted Gospel. Wherever he encountered faith, he deleted everything around by adding the word “alone,” thus making the statement read “by faith alone.” See also, “A Cascade of Errors (1517-2017),” *Op-Ed News*, November 1, 2017. Available at https://www.opednews.com/articles/A-Cascade-of-Errors-1517-by-Carmine-Gorga-Ph-Economics_Economy-Economics-World_Politics_Spirituality-And-Politics-171101-986.html.

right track. And then we must proceed with *love*. We must love what we do. We must love those with whom we travel. It is love that puts us in relationship with The Other; it is love that puts us in relationship with Everything. And, as we all know, there are no rules to love. Love is always new. Love is always creative. Love is always regenerative.

IT IS A DUTY TO HAVE FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE: THE THREE PARTS OF MORALITY

We have a duty to exercise all the virtues. Through a complete systems analysis, it is possible to enumerate all the combinations and permutations of the use and function of all the virtues. Since it is not clearly possible to perform this task here, let us use a short-cut. Let us restrict the analysis to the use and functions of the three theological virtues but let us see them in the context of the full field of operation of morality.

Elsewhere, the reader can find a treatment of a modern definition of morality as composed of three commands: Do not do harm to others, this is the standard canon; there are two more parts: Do not do harm to yourself; do not allow others do harm to you. There the reader will find an emphasis on the importance of the latter two fields, with some reference to many maladies of our age that lead too many to do the bidding of silly friends, maleficent corporations, and dictators, of course (see Hitler and Stalin: ““they made me do it”). After all, in today’s society, one needs to remind women, and even altar boys and altar girls to be on guard against sexual predators and pedophiles.

Here there is the need to emphasize again the importance of not doing harm to ourselves in relation to the epidemic of suicides and the acceptance of euthanasia—as the ultimate form of harming oneself. The person who commits suicide ought to at least consider the harms done to friends and relatives; indeed, even to strangers. This writer is in so much pain every time he remembers the suicide of Anthony Bourdain that he cannot read or listen to one word about it. Let us emphasize some of the harm done by the acceptance of euthanasia. Certainly, those who recommend it cannot be happy people; and those who

accept it for friends and relatives might at least suffer from a doubt cursing through their brain: Why did I give up the struggle for life without even attempting to enter or persisting in the arena? Why neglect the ultimate gift of God to human beings: endomorphins.

THE INTEGRITY OF THE VIRTUES

The moral action calls for the intervention of *all* virtues at the same time. Thus, the moral action is the action that is *prudent, just, courageous, temperate, wise, true, and full of understanding, hope, faith, and love*.⁵¹ This is still too long a definition to be useful in relation to our modern limited memory bank and attention span. The writer should then like to turn our vision toward a future in which all virtues are indeed exercised.

What will the ultimate result be? We will become responsible people; we will assume responsibility for our words and our actions.

Not a small feat at all. Because then we know in our innermost being that we have done everything we can in relation to any particular situation. Two of our largest responsibilities, of course, are toward our children and toward nature. And how will we reach this conclusion? Because we have been prudent, just, courageous, temperate, wise, true, and full of understanding, hope, faith, and love in relation to children and nature.

There is an automatic benefit that we obtain when we know that we have done everything we can in relation to any particular situation. We become “detached.” Psychologically, we separate ourselves from it—whatever the “it” is, even a piece of writing. We separate ourselves from any situation. We separate ourselves even from life itself, because, as a wise woman, St. Caterina da Siena, noticed, once detached we are no longer afraid of anything, even death.

Then we are free to change course. New task. New life.

The reader will have to construct the canvass of operation of the virtues. A couple of questions should suffice to initiate the analysis. Is it possible to grab the courage to set foot out of bed in the morning without hope? Is it possible to have

⁵¹ While this writer knows little or nothing on how to exercise any of the virtues from prudence to love, he has done extensive research and offered extensive recommendations on how to be just and how to be truthful. In these two fields he hopes to have—subconsciously—made recommendations that are indeed *prudent, just, courageous, temperate, wise, true, and full of understanding, hope, faith, and love*.

justice without love—especially economic justice? Conversely, what happens to the structure of the moral life if only one virtue is taken away from it? Or imperfectly applied? Is not this the condition that exposes many of the weaknesses of the modern age—or the many deficiencies of our past, for that matter?

CYNICS AND THE MORAL ORDER

Cynics deny that there is such a thing as the moral order. They deny the better nature of men and women.⁵² They deprive themselves of a clear vision of reality and become impotent. When they see only the twisted nature of men and women, they deprive themselves of the understanding that when men and women behave badly, they have succumbed to negative outside forces, be they individual persons or particular aspects of social institutions. Unable to make this analysis, they deprive themselves of the diagnosis of how to make things right. Cynics thus become impotent.

Worse. Cynics who insist that this is a life of pain and sufferance seem to have never experienced—or to deny—the joy of sex, never experienced the joy of music, never experienced the joy of the outdoors. These are the people who, hoping not to be found wrong, try to deny others the joy of sex, the joy of music, the joy of the outdoors. While they declare the joy of sex a “sin,” they attempt to denigrate the joy of music or the joy of the outdoors as “mundane.”

Do these people ever feel in their bones what the Psalmist felt when he said: “For your love (O God) is better than life...”

There is a metaphysical⁵³ and theological truth that cynics ultimately deny. They deny the presence of (the Holy) Spirit in our midst. It is the Holy Spirit, in its essence of Love—love between the Father and the Son—that sustains the better nature of men and women. It is the Holy Spirit that infuses love into the soul of men and women.

The operation through which the Holy Spirit infuses love into the soul of men and women is through the exercise of the virtues—all the virtues.

Hence the philosophical and theological centrality of a virtue-based morality

⁵² See, e.g., [Helliwell](#) and [Wang](#) (2019).

⁵³ Metaphysical literally means beyond physics. This conception re-enters into Relationalism, not only through standard philosophical reasoning, but especially through the establishment of the equivalence of matter to energy and to spirit.

as the distinguishing characteristic of men and women.

III. MEANING AND FUNCTIONS OF VICES

The value of the virtues is so complete because they carry an implicit recommendation against vices. Why avoid vices? Because they hurt ourselves. We shall speak of only three vices: gluttony, greed, and envy. Gluttony leads to disgust of food and drinks; greed leads to such a dissatisfaction with what we have that we always want more; and envy, by concentrating our mind on what other people have, makes what we have vanish.

One last observation. There is no human being who is without vices. The vices are all there. They are all there to be won over by the virtuous man and woman. What is implicit about virtues and vices must be made explicit here. The conquest of vices is not a venture to be undertaken for the benefit of other people, namely society, or even God, perhaps. The war is to be waged for one's own benefit. A long story that might be described more or less conclusively and persuasively has to be reduced here to one benefit per conquest of each vice. This is the list:

1. The conquest of *lust* yields the possibility of knowing a whole other person;
2. The conquest of *gluttony* avoids the pain of seeing a “sinful” pie **disappear** from the dish;
3. The conquest of *greed* grants the freedom to gracefully exit the “rat race;”
4. The conquest of *sloth* supports the ability to run the rat race at our pace;
5. The conquest of *wrath* yields the ability to preserve our “cool” under pressure;
6. The conquest of *envy* offers the enjoyment of our possessions;
7. The conquest of *pride* proffers an accurate measurement of our abilities.

Why is selfishness not listed as a vice? Ah, complex question that leads to a rather complex answer. Selfishness, of course, is the supreme vice. Selfishness encompass all other vices: peel off any vice and you discover selfishness. And what is the penalty for selfishness? Selfishness cuts you off from the rest of humankind. Well, humankind is an all-encompassing category of thought. Let us be specific. Selfishness cuts you off from yourself: your feelings, your ideals, your

own will: you are controlled by selfishness. Selfishness, clearly, cuts you off from all other human beings. But also from nature: it is arguable whether you can enjoy a sunset if you are a selfish person. You are too taken with satisfying your own needs to appreciate anything that does not immediately and clearly serve your immoderate needs.

Ultimately, selfishness cuts you off from God.

Love is a virtue.

Love is a theological virtue.

Love is a **supreme** relational virtue.

To talk of love without talking of God reduces love to a vain sentimental affair.

Writing about history, philosophy, theology, or morality without the presence of Jesus is like writing Hamlet without the Prince.

ONE LAST ISSUE ON VIRTUE AND MORALITY

Why keep two words when the “moral” action is the “virtuous” action? Even Occam might tolerate the use of these two words when the distinctions are looked at closer range. Synthetically, it can be said that while the moral action is always a virtuous action, the virtuous action is not always a moral action. A courageous act, for instance, is not necessarily a moral act: Killing, even in a war, might be a brave act; but it is never a moral act; also. a just act is always a virtuous act, but if it is *disjointed from love, it is not a moral act.*

The virtues allow us to judge individual actions. Morality allows us to judge individual actions by placing them in a more realistic, dynamic, continuous web of life.

The virtues allow us to judge individual actions, separate from one another; one might call them private actions. Morality, instead, by linking all virtues together, allows us to judge actions in relation to all other actions, almost always as a “social” action.

CONCLUSION

Virtue-Based Morality forms the backbone of Concordian economics. See Brady 2024.

Morality is not a theory; it is a practice that responds to the requirements of

freedom and creativity.⁵⁴

By its innate nature, a “strict” definition of the moral act is necessarily a caricature.⁵⁵ It can be much boisterous and vainglorious, but it is empty of content.⁵⁶

Without a definition of morality, are we not left rudderless in the immense sea of life?

Not at all. We are well covered by very concrete virtues—and vices. Virtues and vices cover the entire spectrum of the potential human action. They are just like an x-ray or a spectral analysis of the inner life and external behavior of a human being. Morality is difficult to define just because it applies to each and every human action. Conclusively, the virtuous person is a moral person. And, conversely, the moral person is a virtuous person.

The supreme reason for the importance of a virtue-based morality lies in the last words of Jesus.⁵⁷ We do not seem to understand yet that Jesus had nothing against either money or power; he was only solidly against the immoral use of power and money. Morality is that simple; morality is that complex.

Now, if you want to really savor the complexity of moral philosophy you have to factor in this maxim by St. Thomas Aquinas: “He who is not angry when there is just cause for anger is immoral. Why? Because anger looks to the good of

⁵⁴ Some of the most powerful, modern recommendations for the “good” life come from a 27-year-old facing inevitable death, see Butcher (2018).

⁵⁵ In a very broad sense, this essay is a formal homage to Relationalism. One of the reasons the “morality project” has been abandoned is because there has been an attempt to define morality by itself—all alone. And the project has withered. Relationalism is the relentless application of the well-established rule: No text without context. Words have no meaning by themselves—or worse, as in all corrupt uses of the intellect, words are made to mean whatever one wants. Hence, the context has to be progressively larger in order to approximate the “size” of life.

⁵⁶ An interesting association. As a result of the Relational Method of Analysis, economics, just as morality, becomes a practice, not a theory, not an abstract theory.

⁵⁷ It is the firm opinion of the writer that this paper is in *full consonance* with Biblical morality. The reasons evolve around this path: Neither Moses nor Jesus ever dreamt of imposing their will on other people. Their commandments were strong suggestions issued because of the love they had for every human being. Third, as usual, Jesus summarizes the meaning of the Jewish laws into a few words. The Ten Commandments were reduced to three: love yourself, love, your neighbor, love God. In the process, Jesus revealed the hidden meaning of the Ten Commandments: Each prohibition was an invitation not to suppress love but to express love.

Take the Ten Commandments in a new light. Take them not as infringements on your liberty to (commit grievous errors), but as AUTO selection of infringements of your liberty from committing errors.

justice. And if you can live amid injustice without anger, you are immoral as well as unjust.”⁵⁸

Perhaps, this maxim must be brought up to date, by saying “He who does not say something when he sees injustice is immoral. Why? Because the effort is so small and its effect is that powerful. Injustice does not survive the light of day.”

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⁵⁸ History as well as the history of philosophy helps to assure us that the ultimate outcome of the moral action is a surprising result: the acquisition of the common good.

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