INTRODUCTION: ETHICS AND THE GROUND

Roots, the ground, presupposition, principles – ethics, no less than philosophy itself, seeks these. Digging into the oft-ignored soil nourishing ethical positions, ethicists rightly uncover what otherwise remains unsaid, and in so doing, illuminate the support upon which theories and praxis rely. This number of *Ethical Perspectives* presents four authors on just such an excavation, offering explicit inquiries into the function of ethical ground. Of course, the concept of ground is not univocal, and our authors' explorations each till some of the rich notions comprising it.

Tanya Loughead starts with the attempts of Simone Weil and Emmanuel Levinas to seek the roots of social justice in something much more tangible – and yet infinitely more fragile – than ethical theory: the claim of the Other in its utter indigence. For these two thinkers, the Other provides the ground of ethics in supplying the normativity of ethics without resorting to reason - the need of the Other simply demands my ethical response, my physical sacrifice. Seeking to reconcile Weil and Levinas without dissolving them into one another, Loughead locates the commonality around the pregnant image of bread and hunger. Weil's death of provides haunting image of Levinas' ethics of the Other, and her religious inspiration likewise mirror's that of Levinas. But, Weil's own obsession with food as nothing more than a base need and her embrace of Platonic dualism perhaps blind her to other ways in which the body might be the gateway to social justice, ways which Loughead cultivates through Levinas's concepts of enjoyment and nourishment; for, these stem not just from the notion of indigence, but also excess.

Perhaps no theory of ethics is more alien to the thinking of Levinas and the praxis of Weil than utilitarianism, which is never rooted in the individual as a unique, privileged being, but – classically understood – rather in calculations seeking the optimal distribution of pleasure or good. Afschin Gandjour contributes an analysis of this calculation, which he rightly characterizes as a rational project. The history of the dialogue between

utilitarians and their critics is well rehearsed in the literature, but Gandjour manages to contribute to it by focusing on the recent claims of agent-relative theories, which seek once more to ground the motivation of utilitarianism. He claims it fails in that agent-relative accounts of personal preferences are unsatisfactory, as are their responses to the claims made by evolutionary theory in its observations concerning altruistic behaviour.

Next, Stephan Grant turns his attention to virtue ethics, and asks if we can root a theory of obligation in Aristotle. It would seem not, especially when considered through the light of criticisms inspired by Kant, because within virtue ethics, normativity could only apply to those who possess the necessary virtues, whereas those lacking such would not be covered by such normativity. The requirement that normativity requires universality would then not be fulfilled, and Aristotelian virtue ethics are seemingly incapable of generating a theory of moral obligation. Grant offers a multi-faceted rebuttal: virtue can be seen as objective, or subjective. People may subjectively lack virtue, but our author maintains it can be shown that a happy life (health, friendship, etc.) requires what are considered as objective values. Further, even seemingly psychopathic persons embody some virtue that may, in theory, help to convince them of the need to cultivate this virtue for happiness. And were we to come across somebody so totally lacking in virtue that such a strategy is not possible, Grant asks how a non-virtue ethics theory could be of any help. Thus, it can be argued that even those who lack the understanding of virtues are bound by them, and virtue ethics can then provide a theory of normativity.

Finally, we encounter the question of dependency, which clearly mirrors the roots of ethics as explored in Weil and Levinas. Of course, dependency and independency express their own complex relations with the issue of rootedness, since pure dependency is simply a reduction to the root, whereas independence can never be pure freedom from rootedness. Isabelle Dagneaux looks at how evaluation scales are used to judge the independence, and dependency, of the aged. Continuing a look at philosophical gerontology that has graced our pages a few times before,

Dagneaux suggests that the uses and limitations of evaluation scales are determined by the formation of the concepts, such as dependency and autonomy, they use. Hence, granting their usefulness at the collective level, Dagneaux argues that they are incomplete when looked at from the point of view of the individual patient, and should be complemented with a narrative approach that emphasizes the patient's own evaluation, so that the patient continues to remain at the centre of what is supposed to be his or her own experience, and not be reduced to a relationship determined according to averages.

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