

Abstract

In the current transition to the Anthropocene, the earth will be dominated from now on by human nature rather than nature. This new condition requires a transition to a new worldview and a corresponding new rational justification of morality, which includes the notion of sustainability. It is the main objective of this paper to suggest an encompassing moral framework by deriving a new common denominator for 'human nature'. The resulting framework is based on the integration of earlier philosophical attempts made by the church (biblical revelation), Enlightenment (Kant) and post-modernity (Nietzsche). It is understood that these earlier attempts partly failed as they subsequently dealt with relevant, but one-sided aspects of a more overarching pattern of human nature. This pattern, to be presented here, is based on philosophical and psychological insights and confirmed by (meta-) historical and cultural findings and by the empirical results of a social survey.

From this combined approach a twofold, final and general aim for societal development emerges: sustainability and consciousness development. Herein, sustainability appears as a process of maintaining balance between the essential qualities of human nature, between the physical and the meta-physical qualities and between the individual-private and the collective-public qualities. This view on human nature and human dignity is inspired on the Aristotelian doctrine of the mean and indeed can be seen as integrating different earlier ethical frameworks. The virtue ethical model can ultimately vindicate and differentiate policy objectives, such as the sustainable development goals and legitimate specific policies to achieve them. It qualifies our materialist and individualist culture as being one-sided and substantiates negative ethical judgements based thereof. As it encompasses all the earlier experiences and subsequent lessons of western civilization, the model could at least serve as a moral compass to find our ways in the Anthropocene.

Introduction

The current trajectory of global development is not sustainable, neither under very optimistic assumptions about technological development. The carrying capacity of the global ecosystem is already far exceeded, the financial-economic system faces increasing instability and the social domain tends to the greatest good for the smallest number. In the 'Anthropocene', in which the human impact on the Earth geology and ecosystems has become significant, not everything which is desirable, is possible anymore. The general objective to increase the quality of life and wellbeing has to be reconciled with the decreasing ecological and social carrying capacity of the global system. The call of the Brundtland Commission (1987) to take the needs of future generations into account, brings about the fundamental question what has to be developed in sustainable development. Which assumptions about those future needs can be vindicated and how? The acceptable trade off between the satisfaction of current versus future needs, requires a credible moral framework.

It might be argued that the current 17 Sustainability Development Goals (SDG's) of the UN already constitute the desired framework. But this is a negotiated compromise, rather than a moral view. To a significant extent the goals are mutually inconsistent or even counteract each other (Nilsson, 2016). The crucial 'limits to growth'- notion of the early 70's, and its scientific confirmations over the

following decades, is incorporated into the SDG's creating a contradictory combination of sustainability and ongoing economic growth. The progress of the overall SDG-process is monitored by means of numerous indicators, suggesting a utility optimizing approach. However, the choice of these indicators is heavily value laden and the question which outcomes can be considered to be 'good' is subject to ongoing moral debate. But a moral framework is still lacking.

From the viewpoint of Alasdair MacIntyre (1981), this is not surprising. He takes the position that the moral frameworks of the past have subsequently failed. Only incoherent fragments of these frameworks are left. The religious framework based on biblical revelation was replaced by the framework of the Enlightenment, which was based on human rationality. In a subsequent step Friedrich Nietzsche substituted human rationality by the 'will to power', but according to MacIntyre this last attempt failed as well.

Against this background MacIntyre proposes to go back to Aristotelian virtue ethics, which starts from the central question about the human attitude 'how to live well'. This is expected to come close to the search for a moral framework in which 'sustainability' is an inherent feature. Rather than the utilitarian stock-taking of future consequences of current human attitudes, for example by means of above mentioned sustainability development goals, such a renewed virtue-ethical framework would define sustainability as a timeless moral attitude.

An additional ambition for such a framework is to encompass the three earlier attempts to find a rational justification of morality (the moral frameworks of the church, of the Enlightenment and later of Nietzsche). Herein it is assumed to be very unlikely that all these attempts were wrong in every of their aspects. Most likely they adequately described parts of the larger picture in their own right, in which case they only partly failed. This would imply that essential elements of the three earlier attempts can be considered as constituting elements of the new framework. In such an overarching framework, for example Enlightenment reason is to co-exists with desire and religious ends with Nietzsches nihilism and the 'death of God'.

So, rather than taking again one or the other specific position, the ambition of this paper is to define a virtue ethical framework which is the integration of the earlier philosophical attempts. Following MacIntyre's suggestion, the moral scheme, including the underlying view on human nature, is build in first instance on Aristotelian ethics. But acknowledging that Aristotle is indebted to Plato in matters of virtue ethics, also the works of Plato are included in this initial framework. This is further motivated by Alfred Whitehead's observation (1929) that 'the safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato'. This suggests the initial framework to be congruent with much of the philosophical thought since then. In a second step the overarching moral scheme will be 'confirmed' by psychological, social, cultural and historical insights. It will be shown that a pattern of human nature can be reconstructed which encompasses the moral frameworks which were attempted earlier. And from that more encompassing view on human nature, a new moral framework can be derived of which sustainability turns out to be a core constituting element.

The failure of earlier moral frameworks

In *After Virtue* (1981) Alasdair MacIntyre thus takes the position that the moral frameworks of the past have subsequently failed. The religious framework based on biblical revelation was replaced by the framework of the Enlightenment, which was based on human rationality. In a subsequent step Friedrich Nietzsche substituted human rationality by the 'will to power', but according to MacIntyre this last attempt failed as well:

- 1 In the period preceding the Enlightenment (1650 – 1800), the ethical framework was derived from biblical revelations and the theological doctrines of Christianity, in particular the Catholic (universal) Church derived thereof. Herein the principles of ethics are expressions of a divine ordained law. The Christian belief system has many parallels with Aristotelian thinking; the good, the virtuous is seen as the middle way in between two vices. The moral system is teleological, it is

directed towards 'human flourishing' or 'happiness' as a final end (telos), which is about living well and contemplation on human nature. In Christianity the telos is of religious nature; it cannot be completely achieved in this world, but only in another. Although 13th and 14th century scholars like Thomas Aquinas renew Platonic and Aristotelian thinking, with a significant impact on the European Renaissance, the idea of a religious 'telos' gradually loses ground. Institutional decadence within the Catholic Church and the increasing claims on the –one and single- truth provokes Reformation and religious wars. Later, with the confrontation between Galileo Galilei and the Pope, the upcoming secular science increasingly challenges the religious belief and so the moral, teleological framework derived thereof.

- 2 During the Enlightenment period, the secular rejection of theology and the related scientific and philosophical rejection of Aristotelianism, implied the rejection of the teleological view on human nature as well. As a first consequence, the existing moral rules, which were inherited from the preceding, church dominated period, had lost their teleological justification. Rather than based on a religious 'end' (telos), Enlightenment philosophers now wanted to find a new, rational foundation for objective morality. The most important attempt was made by Immanuel Kant who tried to find objective ethical rules of behaviour by testing to what extent individual subjective principles can be generalized (universalized) to all rational beings and in doing so become a universal law. This was the so called 'categorical imperative' (Kant, 1724; 4:421). The idea is 'to act only in accordance to that principle(maxim) of behaviour through which one at the same time can will that it becomes a universal law'. It is a more sophisticated formulation of the 'golden rule', which is the common moral denominator of many of the world's religions: do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Kant's reason based moral framework has been criticized by many philosophers like Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Arthur Schopenhauer, John Stuart Mill and Nietzsche (Ti Lam 2018). There were two main types of criticism.

- The first criticism was about the question whether reason dominates the passions or the other way round. Kant's deduction of a moral framework from reason was seen as impossible. Men are seen as natural beings, like animals, dominated by passions and desires. David Hume formulated this position as 'reason is and ought to be the slave of the passions and can never pretend to any other office to serve and obey them'. Also Hegel saw it as unnatural for humans to subordinate desire to reason.
- The most important criticism was targeted at the categorical imperative. Hegel considered the universal law to be insufficient as it could provide wrong or non-meaningful answers: the universalizability test would be fine if there were already determinate moral laws, but the test itself can never generate such principles. Since then, given inadequacy, many authors dismissed the test as a satisfactory universal algorithm for all moral deliberation (Korsgaard 2013). In particular MacIntyre (1967; p190) concluded that 'with sufficient ingenuity almost every precept (maxim) can be consistently universalized', so the test does not say much about morality.

In particular this latter criticism on Kant's rule based ethics, brought about a framework based on goals rather than objective rules. This time the goal was to maximize the utility which would be the consequence of human action. In this 'utilitarianism', as represented by Jeremy Bentham and Mill, the pursuit of the greatest happiness for the greatest number was formulated as the new 'telos'. But there are too many different kinds of 'happiness' (in the non-Aristotelian sense) to be useful. Up to the present day a sort of utilitarianism is applied in cost-benefit analysis. Herein 'happiness', or future benefits in general, are reduced to costs and profits by translating values into money (monetization), in combination with arbitrary choices about the rate at which the future is discounted. What remains is a one sided economic optimization, rather than an ethical framework.

Although agreeing with this specific criticism, Allen Wood (2002 p 172) distances himself from the views that finding defects in Kant's universal law as a self-sufficient moral decision procedure, would be a good reason to dismiss Kantian ethics as a whole. Apart from the universal law, a

second feature of Kant's ethics concerns the reasons we have for taking account of the standpoint of others, hence choosing to unite that standpoint with ours under common laws for common ends. It would provide a realm of ends, in which the ends of all rational beings would be systematically united; humanity as an end in itself. The driving mechanism is 'friendship', through which happiness can be achieved. Wood further points to a third aspect of Kant's ethics, which is about the conception of 'who we are' and the related notion of self-worth and autonomy. He concludes that 'Kantian ethics is about having a rational conception of ourselves, which commits us to autonomy, human equality and cosmopolitan community' (p 177).

It is concluded that both Kant's rule based ethics of the universal law and the later concept of utilitarianism have failed in providing a new moral framework. Nevertheless Kant's broader philosophy on the realm of ends about the integration of the individual and the social orientations remains relevant. Through friendship the ends of all rational beings would be systematically united, whether desire dominates reason or not.

- 3 After the Enlightenment period, in the 19th century, earlier belief systems were criticized in several successive steps in the nihilistic philosophy of Nietzsche (van Tongeren 2016). This implied the rejection of metaphysical thinking, of both the Greek and Christian metaphysics, finally resulting in the proclamation of the 'death of God'. Nietzsche rejects the Enlightenment attempts to find a rational and objective basis for morality by the universalization of principles and attitudes from the individual to the social-collective. He took up and extended the earlier arguments of Hegel and Hume against reason in favour of desire. Reason is not superior to desire, it is just an alternative drive, taking dominance over another. Morality thus cannot be derived from reason. Given the non-rational part of human nature, the role of rationality is denied in favour of the role of the human will. His solution to the problem is: let will replace reason! The final driving force then is the 'will to power' of the 'Übermensch' who isolates himself from the community in a kind of radical individualism; herein no good can be found outside of oneself. It is evident that for such morality no claim can be rationally sustained. So, also this attempt at least partly failed.

Herewith all main attempts to give a justification of morality at least partly failed. The non-worldly telos of the church, the Enlightenment with both Kant's ('deontological') approach, emphasizing rules, and Bentham's 'consequentialism', in search for 'the 'greatest good for the greatest number', did not work out, while in the third place Nietzsches criticism lead to the neither fruitful situation in which man has become his own self-sufficient moral authority. Against this background, MacIntyre's suggestion is followed to go back to Aristotelian virtue ethics.

Renewed virtue ethics

Renewed Aristotelian virtue ethics is usually considered to be a form of ethical naturalism, in which ethics in some way is based on considerations of human nature; the question what is involved in being good, qua human being (Rosalind Hursthouse 1999 p 192). The underlying idea is that it is 'good' to realize as human beings our essential nature, what comes down to (ontological) the question 'who we think we really are' ? The answer to that question constitutes the 'human condition'. As a consequence both the human condition and the view on human nature define the ethical orientation and the virtues versus the vices. Due to the interactions between these various 'levels' and quantities, the virtue ethical scheme might become complex and confusing. To maintain clarity and allow more precise definitions of the quantities involved, at first the overall scheme of reasoning is given and illustrated by the various levels in Figure 1:

Human nature is the human response to objects in the world by means of the human qualities of thinking, feeling, willing and acting. Every individual has the freedom to choose which objects or items he or she wants to love, protect, desire, promote, conserve, realize and thus to value. The pattern of human nature is the valuation of the elements, which are in the 'field' of the individual agency; it is a value pattern. On beforehand, there is no criterion yet to judge a certain pattern of human nature as good or bad, as virtuous or vicious. In Aristotelian and Platonic virtue ethics, this criterion is given by

the assumption of a human ‘telos’, a conception of a ‘final end’, a destination or meaning of the human development. To this end, MacIntyre (1981 p53) distinguishes two types of human nature: untutored human nature and essential human nature:

3rd level *Untutored human nature* is the nature of ‘man-as-he-happens-to-be’. It is the subjective choice of an individual or a group of individuals to value certain ‘objects in the world’ above other objects;

5th level *Essential human nature* is the nature of ‘man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-telos’. Human nature in this special case is directed to the final human objective(s)

4th level *Ethics* is the science which has to enable men to understand how to make the (tutored) transition from the untutored (at level 3) to the essential human nature (at level 5) by means of the virtues. Herein *virtues* can be seen as dispositions of moral responsiveness which change the valuations which constitute untutored human nature into the direction of (tutored) essential human nature by promoting certain values and denigrating others. Vices move the valuations away from the telos and thus away from essential human nature. Virtues and vices are forces (agents of change) or traits of character, which make these value patterns change.

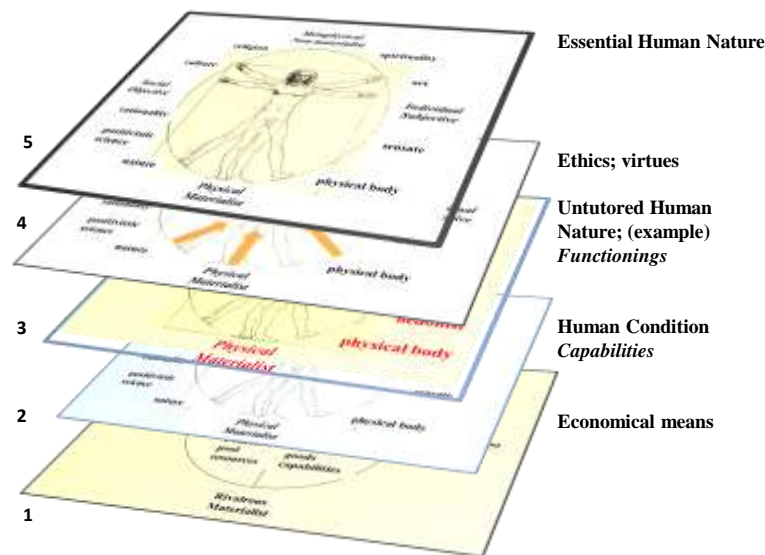


Figure 1: The five levels of the ethical framework.

2nd level The *human condition* contains the ‘capabilities’, such as the physical and non-physical faculties of one’s own body, other people including relatives, nature etc. These are potential elements of human nature, depending on the subjective choices which are made. So the resulting human nature (untutored or ‘tutored’) at level 3 is a chosen subset of the elements of the human condition at level 2.

1st level *Economic goods* forms the lowest level (1) and further enhances the potential of the human condition. Not surprisingly the structure of the economic goods to a large extent corresponds to the structure of the human condition.

The Human Condition

The ‘human condition’ contains all things and qualities in the field of the agent to which the human being has to respond, both in the inside, individual and the outside, collective domain. The items consist of physical, cultural and mental qualities, like the (own) physical body, intellectual insights, artistic expression and on the other hand, other people, nature, cultural objects etc. Apart from these

items themselves, also (and to a certain extent) their relationships, their 'bonds' are relevant. To a large extent these bonds also have a physical, natural background and thus can be considered to be part of the human condition as well; for example the bond between child and mother. The attempt to find an encompassing pattern of the human condition which allows meaningful consideration of untutored versus tutored (essential) human nature, is started from the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato.

Aristotle and Plato

In his *Ethica Nicomachea* (1976, book II-6) Aristotle defines virtue 'as a state of character, a disposition, concerned with choice and lying in a mean which is determined by a rational principle. Herein the choices are about what we value, desire, realize or promote. In these choices, not only reason but also the empirical experience of the senses plays a role. 'Virtue is a mean in between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depends on defect, between too much and too little'. 'It is a mean because the vices exceed or fall short what is right in passions and actions, while virtue both finds and chooses that what is intermediate', so Aristotle.

The most important (cardinal) virtues are temperance, courage, wisdom and justice. For example courage as a virtue is the mean between the vice of rashness in case of excess, and cowardice in case of defect. So the virtue aims at an intermediate condition. Aristotle remarks that 'in each case it is hard to find the intermediate; for instance, not everyone, but only one who knows, finds the midpoint in a circle'. This midpoint can be interpreted as the mean between many pairs of vices which are located on the periphery of this circle. The mean, and herewith the centre of the circle, is about the final end (telos) of the development, which is 'eudaimonia' and which is related to the centre. Herein eudaimonia is interpreted as 'happiness', flourishing or 'living well'. Given the difficulty to find the mean or midpoint, Aristotle suggests as a second best solution that we carry ourselves away from that periphery, thus moving in the direction of the centre as well. Both approaches bring about the virtues as they are directed to the mean.

As the nature of, and the relation between virtues and vices is rather complex, it is often suggested that Aristotle's virtue ethical scheme only makes sense in so far an additional 'background' theory with respect to 'human nature' can be provided, along with a corresponding psychological understanding (Christine Swanton 2003). The search for such a robust and convincing view on human nature is our primary objective in the (re-)construction of a more encompassing moral framework.

Aristotle shared the concept of eudaimonia with his teacher Plato. For both of them, it is the final end of action. But Plato still had a more pronounced background theory of human nature, or more precisely, the human condition. This human condition is understood as being part of a cosmic order and harmony, which has to be mirrored in societal order. This order often is expressed in mathematical or geometrical structures and, in Plato's philosophy, represented by the Forms (eide). These Forms or Ideas can be seen as idealized functional properties of all sorts of 'particulars', such as a chair or a horse and represent the most fundamental aspects of reality. (Julius Moravcsik 1992 p276). For example a Form might be the perfect model of a group of individuals. It reflects the whole – part relation between them. They are non-changeable essentials and represent a domain of eternal truth and values. Forms are not linguistic inventions but have a substantial being, independent from the human mind or psyche. They cannot be immediately known by the senses, but only through reason. Better understanding of the Forms and the harmony between them, enhances the process of mirroring cosmic order into social order and thus enhances virtue. So the source of the virtues is the understanding of these forms as fundamental elements of reality and mirroring the order and harmony in oneself (Julius Moravcsik 1992 p300). The criterion for what to consider as 'good', thus is to be found in the knowledge of the Forms. Being 'objectively good' implies interest in creating harmony and can be seen as the 'meaning of life'.

Forms thus can be seen as idealized generalizations of individual particulars. They relate to 'universals' which are just characteristics which are shared by many particulars. In contrast to Forms, universals are time bound and subject to change and thus form another realm. As the divide between the Form and the particulars plays an important role, this also is the case for the divide between the universals and the particulars. It is the 'horizontal' contrast between the One and the Many, between

objectivity and subjectivity and between the collective and the individual. Plato shares the old Greek holistic ideal of reconciling the One and the Many, which he then translates in the synthesis of the world of Ideas or Forms with the world of the senses.

Apart from this 'horizontal' contrast between the One and the Many, a second key element in Plato's philosophy is the 'vertical' divide between spirit (psyche) and matter. Although there are deviating interpretations of Plato with respect to this divide (Hare, 1982), Plato strongly suggests the divide in his *Phaedo*, where he let Socrates tell about the pre-existence of the soul versus the mortality of the body. Soul and body, spirit and matter are seen as essentially different entities. Moreover the realm of the psyche is not the realm of the (eternal) Forms. The psyche can become aware of the Forms, but the Forms exist as 'things' independent of the psyche (Hare, 1982).

Now the process of ethical 'valuation' evolves along these two contrasts or dimensions. In the 'horizontal' between the Forms (and universals) and the 'particulars' and in the 'vertical' between mind and matter, in which the Forms can be known by the mind. As an example a certain individual can have 'love' for a certain object or person given a certain characteristic, for example courage. It then is 'rational' to extent that love to all elements (persons) which have this characteristic of courage. In a subsequent step it is seen as rational not to love all courageous person, but courage as such. This then implies a shift to a more abstract notion and herewith a further shift into the direction of the Forms (Moravcsik 1992 p111). Moving through the subsequent stages of the process, the object of the initial 'love' has shifted to the abstract characteristic 'courage'. There is no need to keep that abstract object all for oneself, so egoism makes room for altruism.

After all, there remains a discrepancy between Platonist and Aristotelean ethics. Although the reconciliation of the One and the Many, the general and the particulars, is a key issue for Plato, he describes the ethical process (in search for the good) as a rational shift from the particulars to the general Forms. This is at odds with Aristotle's position who sees the good as the mean between, in this case, the particulars and the Forms. To Aristotle the particulars are as important as the general Forms. The particulars have to be interpreted as the ability (phronesis) to deal with actual problems in particular situations. This apparent discrepancy between Plato and Aristotle is not problematic; it will turn out to be a recurrent theme throughout the history of philosophical and ethical thought, representing the tensions between reason and the passions.

In summary,

Aristotle suggests a *circular pattern* in which the virtues point to the centre and the vices to the periphery. The mean or midpoint of the circle represents a final objective or 'telos' and corresponds with the 'good'. This centre is the mean between two opposing vices. Aristotle does not give a further specification (background theory) of this structure of opposing vices.

Plato does give such a further specification, although not fully uncomplicated. He distinguishes two divides or contrasts which already were interpreted as horizontal and vertical:

- The '*horizontal*' contrast was between the One and the Many, the universals and the particulars, which also is interpreted as the collective versus the individual. As will be discussed this contrast also represents the divide between objectivity and subjectivity.
- The '*vertical*' contrast is about mind (or psyche) versus matter, which is also understood as the meta-physical versus the physical and the im-material versus the material. Both the horizontal and the vertical contrasts (opposites) can be seen as 'axes' in Aristotle's circular scheme.

The resulting pattern of the human condition is presented in Figure 2. For reasons to be discussed later, the basic pattern is projected against the background of Da Vinci's Vitruvian man. The orientations on the horizontal axis can be differentiated into ontological and epistemological characteristics:

<i>Ontological</i>	Universals	Particulars
	One	Many
	Collective	Individual

<i>Epistemological</i>	Uniformity	Diversity
	Universal	Singular
	Objective	Subjective
	Realist	Relativist
	Rational	Empirical

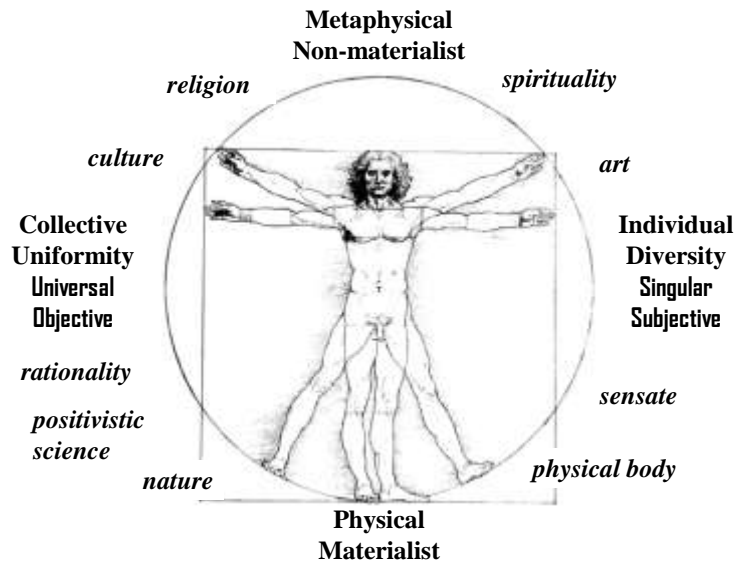


Figure 2: Human condition; as items in the field of the agent (2nd level in Figure 1)

The upper right quadrant represents the spiritual ‘mindset’ in terms of insights, feelings, artistic expressions, contemplative attitudes of individuals; the lower right quadrant contains our own body and the physical (hedonistic) sensations. The left hand side is a generalization of the particular elements on the right hand side; art is generalized to culture, spirituality to structural / institutional religion and the physical, biological body to nature.

Knowledge is obtained from the five subjective senses at the lower right hand side, from intuition as ‘the sixth sense’ at the upper right hand side and from objective reason (and rationality) at the left hand side (for example mathematical insights).

The ‘items in the field’ (pattern) of the human condition are within (bodily wellbeing) or outside the agent, be it physical (other human beings, property, money etc) or abstract (knowledge, beauty, etc). Their mutual positions represent the ‘bonds’ between the items, for example the bond between the individual (right) and his body (below), or between individuals and ‘the others’ (left).

This ‘human condition’ corresponds to the more practical ‘capabilities’ concept of Sen and Nussbaum (Sen, 1993). They consider relationships with objects as being ‘capabilities’ to deal with features as physical life, health, physical integrity, senses, imagination, thinking emotions, reflections, other species and games, as well as political and material control over one’s own environment. From these capabilities, elements can be chosen or valued by a specific culture or individual. The chosen subset then consists of the ‘functionings’. In fact, these functionings, as subset of chosen capabilities, corresponds to the pattern of MacIntyre’s untutored human nature.

Economic goods

The realization of the items which are valued and chosen from the human condition (or from Sen’s capabilities) on the 2nd level, can be considered to be intermediate ends. The means to this ends are (to a large extent) given or supported by goods, which are part of, and generated by the economic system. The vertical contrast between physical and metaphysical (non-materialist) items runs parallel to the economic difference between rivalrous and non-rivalrous goods. Non-materialist goods, like culture,

insights, information are non-rivalrous, as they will not run out of supply by increasing consumption, in contrast to most of the physical-material goods.

The horizontal contrast between individual and collective runs parallel with the categories of exclusive versus non-exclusive goods. Individualism tends to make goods, whether rivalrous or not, exclusive, often by appropriation. It results in the demarcation between public and private goods. Combination of the two axes produces the four basic categories (quadrants) of economic goods:

public goods, (exclusive) 'club'-goods
private goods, common pool resources.

The base (2nd level) and the economic means on the 1st level form a bi-directional link, given the fact that the process of valuation of the base items is highly influenced by the availability of such economic means, apart from influencing the valuation process by commercials. It demonstrates how the economic domain is linked via the levels 2 and 3 to the ethics on level 4. It thus cannot be considered to be value-free; the economic system has to facilitate the choices which are made at the higher levels, not the other way round.

Untutored Human Nature

From all the (potential) 'items in the field' which constitute the human condition (Figure 2) every individual chooses the items which she wants to love, promote or more in general wants to value. This chosen subset of the human condition results in the pattern of untutored human nature. For example a specific subjectively chosen pattern may show high valuations in the lower right corner of the Figure, implying a one sided focus on individualist-materialist values, such as the own physical body. Other patterns might concentrate values in the opposing upper left quadrant, for example in case of a religious orientation. As will be discussed later, valuation in practice tends to structures which dominantly are one-sided, thus concentrating in one of the quadrants of the base pattern. Untutored human nature thus is the (very) one sided version of tutored (essential) human nature. The value patterns in these quadrants can be seen as *Weltanschauungen* or worldviews.

The thus defined (untutored) human nature as a value pattern, comes close to what Christine Swanton (2003 p2) calls the 'base of moral responsiveness', which comprises both values and bonds between the various items in the field. As a small difference, the (natural, physical) bonds as applied here are seen as elements of the underlying 'human condition', rather than human nature, as they are seen as given and thus independent of valuation and choice.

Essential human nature

As long as there is no telos defined, untutored human nature is morally neutral; it is impossible to distinguish virtue from vice. As soon as a '*telos*' can be acknowledged, virtues can be distinguished from vices and an ethical outlook or framework is defined. The crucial difference between untutored and essential human nature is therefore the notion of a human telos. This brings Rosalind Hursthouse (1999 p20) to the position that virtue is a character trait which is needed to reach the telos. The virtues have to be seen as forces, which change the values in the untutored human nature in the direction of essential human nature.

In ethical naturalism the telos should be rather reconstructed out of the objective (because natural) human condition, than out of subjective patterns of untutored human nature. As indicated earlier, in ethical naturalism flourishing is a flourishing of the species as a whole and of man as a social animal. Hursthouse (1999; p202) translates this in the question whether its parts, actions, desires and emotions serve well: (1) its individual survival, (2) the continuance of the species, (3) its characteristic freedom from pain and characteristic enjoyment, and (4) the good functioning of its social group— in the ways characteristic of the species. In this approach of ethical naturalism these four ends of human flourishing are thus elements of the essential pattern of human nature. Hursthouse considers the

pattern as a battleground between passion and reason, or self-interest and sociality, as a counsel of despair.

The pattern of essential human nature proposed here can be seen as a further articulation of this ethical naturalist view of Hursthouse. The Aristotelian and Platonic concept of eudaimonia presented here comprises the four typically human characteristics she mentioned. The 'happiness' or flourishing of the species or of the individual also takes account of 'living well' as a condition for the lifetime as a whole: 'it is a sort of activity of the soul in accord with virtue'.

At least in Aristotle's scheme, Eudaimonia is to be located in the centre of the pattern of essential human nature. This centre is opposite to the manifold vices pointing outwards to the circular periphery. This also implies that the virtues are expected to point at the centre. This can also be understood from Swanton's consideration that the interaction between virtues and eudaimonia is bi-directional; how items in the field are valued depends on the virtues and finally the concept of eudaimonia. Indeed, once there is a concept of eudaimonia or telos (and only in that case), it will become clear what is to be seen as virtuous and subsequently valuable, confirming the bi-directional relation. As a consequence, the correct conception of the virtues is, at least partly, shaped by a correct conception of the telos as well. In Platonist ethics the value changing forces of the virtues result from a certain plasticity of human nature (Moravcsik 1992, p109). This also implies a certain plasticity of the human telos and herewith of the 'essence' of man as well. This points to Aristotle's notion that it might be hard to find the mean, which suggests that the position of the mean is not very outspoken. As will be discussed later, this relates to the fact that 'the good' is not restricted to a very narrow range of valuations. In contrast, there are many sets of valuations which can be considered as 'good'. It might be observed that (within the circle) closer to the centre the cohesion between the values is stronger. Further away from the centre they become weaker. Beyond the periphery, values become more one-sided and lose cohesion with the other (typically human) values. From a psychological point of view the preoccupation with very one-sided value orientations will become obsessive and result in psychosis, at the cost of all the other values within the circle. By definition the values within the circle which all have a minimal mutual cohesion constitute '*human dignity*', warranting 'living well' in accordance to human nature. Outside the circle, cohesion is lost, and thus human dignity is lost. In the ethical-naturalist approach chosen here, the pattern of essential human nature corresponds to the central part (by definition within the circle) of the human condition pattern. This after all psychological hypothesis will be confirmed later by the works of Carl Jung.

Ethics

Apparently, virtues are centripetal forces ('vectors') which change the subjective valuation of the items in the field of the human condition. By far the most important centripetal force is (universal) love in which the individual is invited to value not only his own existence (right hand side values) or his own relatives (more to the left), but also more distant people, as well as his physical environment, including nature. Aristotle calls this most important, overarching virtue 'friendship' (philia). In Christianity and many other spiritual orientations it is called 'love'. It is about empathy, respect and valuation of the diagonal opposing elements of the human condition. These centripetal forces appear to increase cohesion between the (typically) human values.

In contrast, vices are centrifugal forces, which bring about fragmentation of human nature. As soon as the dominating value orientation shifts into the periphery of the pattern of essential human nature, the respective values become such an obsession that any cohesion with the other values constituting 'human nature' is lost altogether. This implies by definition that '*human dignity*' is lost; human functioning is no longer based on, or related to the whole array of coherent values and faculties (within the circle) which makes people human. The resulting pattern, wherein peripheral values dominate one way or the other, then is a (specific) representation of *untutored human nature*. As will be demonstrated, (macro-) history can be seen as a wandering through the pattern of *the human condition*, time and again resulting in value-domination of different parts of the periphery and thus in ever

changing forms of untutored human nature. On the individual (micro-) level these many forms of one-sidedness come to expression as psychosis, as demonstrated by psychology.

The virtues thus ‘move towards’ and ‘acknowledge’ and have to be seen as dynamic operators which actively shape or change both the valuation process itself and the promotion and/ or realization of the underlying values. They may be seen as ‘vectors’ which have a centripetal orientation in case of virtues and a centrifugal one in case of vices. Where the virtues (and vices) can be seen as vectors, the values on which they operate can be interpreted as scalar quantities.

In Book IV of the Republic, Plato describes four virtues as cardinal ones; courage, temperance, wisdom and justice. Aristotle later added several others, in the first place friendship, but also truthfulness and greatness of soul. These virtues can be understood in the combined Aristotelian-Platonist scheme. The cardinal virtue *courage* stimulates the dynamics of the valuation process; it invites to explore new (value) orientations and face the consequences thereof. *Temperance* is the cardinal virtue which tends to the centre of the pattern, avoiding the extreme positions of the periphery. *Wisdom* can be understood from Plato’s view that the good can be found by acquiring knowledge of the Forms. *Friendship* typically fits in the Aristotelian scheme of the mean. It supports the forces of love (in Christianity) and compassion, which in turn support the movement to the centre. In sum, the virtues are centripetal forces which tends to shift the value orientation to the telos in the centre.

It might be questioned whether all virtues are teleological, i.e. directed to the telos (in the centre). Swanton (2003, p93) takes the position of a ‘pluralistic’ view of virtue status, wherein virtues might contain both teleological and non-teleological elements. She argues that apart from (rather selfish) human flourishing, in reaching the centre, one has also to respond to the ‘demands of the world’. However in the pattern of essential human nature as derived here, the demands of the world are comprised (in the left hand side) as well. This means that the demands of the world are already part of the telos and thus no longer are non-teleological elements. The same holds for the right hand side of the pattern, where more individual values might be so strong that they become egoistic. This refers to Nietzsches account of ‘self-love’ which indeed has to be seen as a constituting part of our essential nature. Without this self-love the ‘demands of the world’ at the left hand side cannot be balanced into eudaimonia. Self-love at the right hand side of the pattern, thus is a necessary requisite for maintaining equilibrium.

Psychological interpretation

As indicated, the interaction between untutored and essential nature also has to be understood from a psychological point of view. Indeed, the concept of Aristotelian mean (mesotes) runs closely parallel to the views of psychologist Carl Gustav Jung, who sees ‘opposites as extreme qualities in any state, by virtue of which the state is perceived to be real, for they form a potential. The psyche is made up of processes whose energy springs from the equilibration of all kinds of opposites’ (Jung, 1953 p 117). He further states that ‘the ego keeps its integrity only if it does not identify with one of the opposites, and if it understands how to hold balance between them’ (p 129). This, according to Jung can only be done if it remains aware of both. By bridging the opposites, consciousness inevitably spreads throughout the entire base (of the human condition) and the middle is experienced as self-consciousness. Against this background, Jung interprets the pattern of (essential) human nature as the representation of the human ‘Self’, which integrity and internal cohesion has to be maintained and strengthened. Rather than an absolute centre, the human telos primarily requires restless equilibration of all kinds of opposites. The experience of a real Self in the centre, equilibrating the many opposites, comes close to Aristotle’s description of ‘eudaimonia’.

In the periphery the values lose their mutual coherence and thus become one-sided. Swanton (2003) describes this as manifestations of hyper-objectivity (left) or hyper-subjectivity (right). This is in agreement with Jung’s warning that ‘when the separation is carried so far that the complementary opposite is lost sight of, the result is one-sidedness, which is then compensated from the unconsciousness without our help’ (Jung 1945). The result of which will be psychosis, obsessive

preoccupation with very one-sided value orientations, which by definition have lost cohesion with the core of human value orientations (within the circle) and thus with human dignity.

The interpretation of (essential) human nature given here is also compatible to modern day psychological insights. Ryan et al. (2008) identified motivational, psychological concepts for eudaimonic living. Herein, important goals were:

- intrinsic goals and values, (for their own sake) such as personal growth, relationships, community and health;
- extrinsic goals and values such as wealth, fame, image and power.

They argue that 'eudaimonia is a way of living in which intrinsic values predominate. Intrinsic values are built into human nature. In contrast, extrinsic goals (though not all) are not inherent in human nature but are acquired. Its items are to be found on, or outside the periphery and the promotion or valuation of these items is considered to be vice. It goes along with Aristotle's difference between happiness as living well (eudaimonia) versus happiness as experiencing pleasure (hedonia). In human nature, the physical hedonic pleasures are to be found on the periphery of the lower right quadrant. In contrast to hedonic pleasures, eudaimonia necessitates the exercise of reflective capacities, in which one considers the meaning and value of one's way of living. The nowadays increasing popularity of 'mindfulness' can be seen as an answer to that necessity. Ryan reports that such striving for eudaimonia appears to relate positively to one's sense of meaning, vitality and health. They also found 'higher levels of inner peace, frequent experiences of both moral evaluation and connectedness to a greater whole, that transcends the individual'. This is in full agreement with Jung's insight that bridging and reconciliation of the opposites brings about higher levels of consciousness. It is concluded that the virtue ethical framework, to be based on the proposed pattern of essential human nature is as well supported by findings on the psychological level.

Confirming sources

So far the virtue ethical scheme, in particular the pattern of the human condition, was presented as being only based on the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato. However in practice this pattern emerged to some extent in interaction with other sources as well, in particular meta-history, culture and an empirical social survey. To maintain clarity in this process, these other sources will be described here are 'confirmations' of the initially presented pattern:

1 Meta-history and philosophical understanding

History is a wandering of (untutored) human nature through the human condition. The quadrants coincide with major historical periods. As described earlier (van Egmond, 2014) and based on macro-historical studies, there is a tendency that during historical periods, values predominantly are allocated to specific parts / quadrants of the human condition (Figure 2), thus resulting in dominant one-sided patterns of human nature during those periods. This one-sidedness tends to increase, among other mechanisms due to the promotion of these very values. As a consequence the system becomes decadent, develops into a caricature of itself and cannot be sustained. In many cases, this heralded the end of established social structures and subsequent historical catastrophes (van Egmond, 2014).

The subsequent over-valuation of quadrants of the human condition shows a certain structure over time. In general, the shift to the right hand side quadrants implies more pluralism and diversity and becomes manifest as scepticism against the doctrines of the left hand side of the pattern of the human condition. In history, time and again the moral debate comes down to the question whether the concept of ethics has to be based on the rational, timeless and universal axioms of the left hand side, or the empirical experiences, including the senses and desires on the right hand side. Remotely this runs parallel to the initial difference between Plato and Aristotle. Plato focussing more on the universal left hand side, Aristotle paying attention as well to the particular situation on the right in which acting as the occasion requires (phronesis) is relevant as well.

Apart from significant oscillations on smaller time scales, the dominating value orientations through history by and large describe a counter clockwise movement through the quadrants of the human condition. This can be understood both from Platonist ethics, as indicated earlier, and from the macro-historical mechanisms which have been described among others by Toynbee (1946) and Sorokin (1957). In Platonist thought, what we find worthy tends to be abstract, and non-physical. The creative urge is to extend something (to the left) that is found worthy. Given the position of the ego at the right hand side, this corresponds to giving or even dictating 'ideas' to the others (in the upper left direction) and to taking or appropriating physical 'things' from the others (in the lower right direction). This then explains the tendency of the dominating valuations in the pattern of untutored human nature to move counter clockwise over time, as will be described later.

Early Christianity; upper right

Early Christianity was based on the individual beliefs of the individual participants, it typically represents the value orientation of the upper right quadrant. As a consequence, diversity is high. As indicated there is a growing tendency to 'give' the belief system to others, which implies a subsequent shift to the left hand side of the human condition.

Universal Church; upper left

Around 400 this process of universalization was effectuated by the foundation of the Roman Catholic (means universal) church, implying a claim on the one and single truth as it becomes manifest at the left hand side of the human condition pattern. In the upper left quadrant this resulted in the dogmatism of the Universal Church (Toynbee, 1946).. Ethics was based on biblical revelation and the formal and unique interpretation of the church thereof. Increasingly, non-commitment with the universal catechism was punished heavily by the Inquisition. Finally, in the 16th century, competing claims on the universal truth brought about the Reformation, which runs more or less parallel to the European Renaissance.

European Renaissance and counter-Renaissance

After the fall of Byzantium in 1453, the inflow of Aristotelian thinkers brought about the European Renaissance, which implied scepticism about the idea of universal truth (of the church) at the left hand of the pattern. Erasmus and Montaigne were the proponents of this more liberal thinking, shifting the value orientations more to the centre and the right hand side of the pattern of the human condition during the 16th century. It became manifest in the reintegration of thought and feeling and in making room for renewed toleration of diversity, ambiguity and uncertainty (Toulmin 1990 p153). Given the process of secularization which was inherent with the 'descent' of the dominating value orientations at the left hand side of the human condition pattern, the French king Henri IV tried to reduce the role of religion in politics. By means of the Edict of Nantes (1598) he regularized the position of the Protestant citizens versus the Catholics, hoping for tolerance and reconciliation between the two factions.

However the Catholic League continued to invoke religious uniformity under the banner of 'one King, one Law and one Faith'. The assassination of Henri IV in 1610 signalled the counter-Renaissance. The reconciliation process was over and hostilities between the two religious factions about the possession of the one and single truth increased strongly, finally culminating in the 30-years war (1618-1648) in which one third of the European population was killed.

This simultaneously implied that the dominating value orientation shifted back to the left hand side of the human condition pattern, from the more particular, to the universal, from the local to the general (Toulmin 1990 p34). Ethics became again a field for general abstract theory. The Aristotelian view that specific circumstances (on the right hand side) do matter as well, faded away, making again room for the more Platonic view on the domination of universal forms as represented by the left hand side of the human condition pattern.

Enlightenment

Given the ongoing descent from the religious, meta-physical orientation to the more physical-materialist orientation, the solution to the problem of the one and single truth was not given by the church but by the state and in particular by science. Science was the successor of the church in finding absolute truth and the rational system of ethics was based on universal, timeless axioms. The new 'single truth' of science successfully made an end to the ongoing battle between religious factions on the universal truth of 'the' church. Its milestone was the end of the (religious) thirty-year war in 1648 and the beginning of the 'Enlightenment'. Proponents of this return to the values on the left hand side, were Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza and Kant:

Descartes was the first to taught that philosophical understanding never comes from accumulating experience of particular individuals, but rather from universal timeless reason. Rather than solving timely questions, the aim was to bring light to the permanent, universal timeless structures, which were underlying them.

Hobbes (1588- 1679) still considered the (particular) passions to take a central place in the moral picture. He saw a theory of morals as inseparable from a theory of human nature; the dominating passion would result in a war of all against all. This only could be prevented by a universal, sovereign authority in the form of the absolute State (on the left hand side). This moment in time can be seen as advocating the most central left position in the pattern of the human condition in order to prevent the balance to be lost to the right hand side of the domination passions.

Spinoza (1632 – 1672) initially attempted to derive ethics from the universals of mathematics. Following Plato he considered the knowledge derived thereof as 'reason, which is the way in which we have common notions and adequate ideas of the property of things' (Nadler, 2006 p178). The common notions do not explain the essence of any particular, singular thing, but provide the conceptual and explanatory framework within which the truth of singular things can be apprehended. It is a process of deduction, from the general at the left to the particular / singular on the right hand side, from cause to effect. Adequacy refers to the capability of the knowledge of general 'reason' to change the knowledge obtained from the right hand side passions of the particular. Interestingly, Spinoza mentions a third form of knowledge, which is intuitive. It is the perception we have when a thing is perceived through its essence alone; it is the immediate perception of the connection between cause and effect. It involves knowledge of God or Nature itself. It comes close to some sort of eudaimonia in the centre, and thus to the Aristotelian framework.

The earlier discussed 18th century rule based moral framework of *Kant* (1724 – 1804), the categorical imperative, can be seen as the test whether individual values and principles of the right hand side can be generalized to the universal principles of the left hand side. It thus is an inductive method; from the particular on the right to the universal on the left. In doing so, the measure of cohesion between the values which constitute human nature, and thus human dignity, increases, which is considered as 'good'. The Aristotelian mean between the individual and the collective 'others' is reached. As discussed earlier, according to Wood (2002) Kant's critics have overemphasized the categorical imperative as decisive ethical decision formula and, as a consequence, dismissed this wider significance of Kant's ethics as a whole. This certainly also has to be found 'in its substantive conception of rational nature and autonomy as the real grounds of ethical value'. Wood further argues that 'Kant found it appealing to associate our human dignity with the thought that we are supernatural beings, or have a divine spark and destiny that transcends anything our empirical science can ever hope to grasp'. Apparently Kant was not only concerned with ethical rules, but also with human ends, be it that the two remain unrelated. Herewith Kant, just like Spinoza, incorporated some Aristotelian elements, including a certain telos. And apart from the horizontal dimension in which he integrated the individual in the universal, he also refers to the vertical dimension which brings him closer to the basic-assumptions of Plato as well.

Romanticism

Since the Enlightenment, science has been the successor of the church in the quest for universal truth. In the lower left quadrant, universal values continued to be the most important orientations, but were now combined with materialist, rather than religious values. The 'Zeitgeist' came to expression in large scale industrialization, which in the 19th century provoked Romanticism. Herein, the human feelings and passions together with spiritual experiences came to the fore, typically representing the individualist, non-materialist values of the opposing upper right quadrant. Ethical norms now are based on the esthetical; the good is the beautiful. However, also here the value orientation gradually became extreme; spiritual experiences turned into spiritism. At the end of the 19th century the romantic values were worn out and history took its original course in the lower left quadrant, resuming the earlier universal, materialist values.

Late Modernism

In the early 20th century, socialism finds its caricature in absolute state and later in communism at the left hand side of the pattern. Marx statement that it is primarily the social existence that determines human consciousness was exaggerated in Stalinism by a radical denial of the existence of the individual at all. In National Socialism the universal state appears for the last time (Ein Volk, Ein Reich, Ein Führer) and mingles with mythic elements of the (Romantic) upper right quadrant.

Also in the lower left quadrant, the single truth of science generates technology for the industrial revolution, (partly perverted) globalization and a science-driven, unprecedented population explosion. In the lowest part of the human value pattern, where the obsession with material values reaches its maximum, this combination with the population explosion brings about the ecological crisis.

Post-Modernism

The circular movement through the lower left quadrant implies a simultaneous increase of both the materialist and the individualist values. Already in the 19th century *Schopenhauer* (1788 – 1860) stated that individualism finally would take the form of the will to survival, also in the physical sense. He saw three basis motives in human nature; self-/survival driven interest, malice and sympathy. Malice and sympathy respectively are synonymous with the 'bad' centrifugal and centripetal forces which were discussed earlier.

Finally it was *Nietzsche* (1844 – 1900) who took the idea of the will further in stating that 'not happiness, but the will to power is the fundamental human goal'. Sympathy and compassion were considered to be human weaknesses. Not accepting any authority outside the autonomous Übermensch, he declares 'God to be dead', denigrating both Christianity and Buddhism (in the upper left quadrant). In this thinking, the values of the lower right, individual-physical seem to dominate. Russel (1946) concludes that Nietzsche never realized that the will to power of his Übermensch has to be seen as a compensation for anxiety.

In the current lower right 'Post-Modern' quadrant, the existence of society is denied (Thatcher); individual materialism finds its caricature in obsessive attention to the own physical body and in neo-liberalism. In particular the financial-economic system poses severe risk to the sustainability of the social fabric, as already was demonstrated by the 2008-financial crisis, which had the economic impact of a world war (Wolf 2015). The idea of a universal truth is fading away, which comes to expression in nowadays propagation of 'alternative facts'.

Toulmin (1990) sees the recent shift to the right hand side of the human nature pattern, as a renewed shift from general to practical philosophy, to some extent from Plato to Aristotle. Apart from the return to the particular (in case studies), he observed the associated return to the oral (the increasing significance of speech), the return to the local (for example in the renewed interest for indigenous people) and the return to the timely, for example accepting the idea that nature or climate are no longer stable. More in general he considers the shift from Modernity to Post-Modernity, so from the left hand side values to the right hand side as a renewed humanism, comparable to the European Renaissance,

some 500 years earlier. In both developments the dogmatic universal concepts were weakened in favour of more individualist values and subsequent tolerance and pluriformity.

However, there might be a difference between the two movements. The Renaissance brought about some Aristotelian equilibrium, while the present shift to the more individualist values seems to overshoot in one-sidedness and imbalance. More in general, the centrifugal shift of value orientations into the periphery of the human condition provokes catastrophe and thus un-sustainability. The other way round, catastrophes and social discontinuities are avoided by a more centripetal orientation, when values are predominantly allocated to the values which are more central in the base (pattern). The empirical fact that catastrophes are associated with one-sided orientations outside the human nature pattern legitimizes the final telos in its centre.

Summarizing

Although the subsequent philosophies and moral concepts which emerged over the past millennia differ from each other, they apparently are parts of a single overarching framework. As MacIntyre concludes (1967 p259) ‘each form of life carries with it its own picture of human nature. The choice of a form of life and the choice of a view on human nature go together’. Nevertheless, it follows from the interpretation given above, that these different ‘pictures of human nature’ can be considered as parts of the larger picture of the human condition. Philosophical thought and human history appear to be a wandering through the various parts of the human condition. They can be understood from the specific values which dominate timely in these parts. So the pattern of the human condition, and the pattern of essential human nature derived thereof in the ethical naturalist approach, can be considered as the overarching framework of (a large part of) philosophical thought. As this overarching pattern was initially (to a large extent) derived from Plato’s philosophy, this supports Whitehead’s earlier mentioned observation that ‘the safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato’.

It is concluded that the three historical attempts to find a rational vindication for morality (biblical revelation, human rationality and individual will) correspond to the upper left, lower left and lower right quadrants of the base pattern in Figure 2:

- In the moral system, promoted by institutional religion of the church, the meta-physical ,non-materialist values (above) were dominating, in combination with the universal (‘catholic’) values on the left. This implies the upper left quadrant.
- The focus on secular-materialist rationality and universalizability in finding a new moral foundation during the Enlightenment period (Kant and others) corresponds to the values allocated to the lower left quadrant.
- Nietzsche’s opposition against both the metaphysical and the collective–universal values, resulted in the rejection of both these earlier two attempts, which were based on left hand side value orientations. His moral system is based on the materialist individual orientation which is characteristic for the lower right quadrant; it is anti-social, anti-religious and anti-spiritual as well. So in these three attempts, the meta-physical was replaced by rationality, which in turn was replaced by Nietzschean will.

2 Culture

The base pattern of essential human nature, as given in Figure 1, turns out to be overwhelmingly expressed in art and culture throughout the centuries (van Egmond, 2014). Not only many myths (Icarus), legends (King Arthur) and fairy tales (Cinderella), but also musical compositions (Mozart, Wagner) and many great works of literature, such as those of Shakespeare refer to this basic pattern. The latter is an exponent of European Renaissance, among many others influenced by Da Vinci, who’s drawing of the Vitruvian man (the background of Figure 2) depicts the Renaissance theme. Herein man is seen as fitting both in the square, representing the physical body and in the circle, representing the meta-physical, thus reconciling mind and matter in the vertical divide.

In all these representations of Figure 2, both the human life and the social development is a quest. Only through coping with the many harms, dangers, temptations and distractions, the final end, the telos of the mission is gradually to be understood (Campbell 1949). In many myth and fairy tales, the lower ego, represented by the prince (on the right hand side), has to reach the castle in the centre to awaken higher consciousness, as represented by the princess. In achieving this, - they can happily live thereafter- , 'happiness' is meant as eudaimonia. The virtuous quest is to reach the centre by virtuous behaviour. In the medieval Parsifal-epos and in the similar opera of Richard Wagner, the centre is reached only after having lived through all the aspects of life, as represented by the periphery, including the lower right hand side sensual temptations and the left hand side 'demands of the world'. In Wagner's Ring des Nibelungen, civilization (Walhalla) is lost as the centrifugal forces are too strong. However in Tolkien's Lord of the Rings, the fellowship of the ring is based on 'friendship' as the most dominant centripetal force, through which the periphery can be avoided and 'middle earth' can be saved.

In his 'Republic'(400 BC) Plato interestingly describes 'arts' only as relevant insofar they contribute to the centripetal forces and weaken the orientation on the passions. Indeed this moral condition is reflected by the Aristotelian view on human nature. Art and spirituality are the most individual expressions of human nature. Eudiamonia is reached by 'keeping together' all the human faculties within the periphery. It is all about strengthening and maintaining coherence between these underlying elements of human nature. This thus also holds for the upper right quadrant. It would imply that there is something as 'virtuous art', which shows the path to the centre and thus supports the cohesion of the values within the circular pattern of essential human nature which by definition is human dignity. In contrast, 'vicious art' contributes to fragmenting centrifugal forces and the subsequent catastrophic effects on the individual and society at large.

3 Social surveys

With respect to the epistemological question of what is said above, the knowledge deployed has been obtained by philosophical reasoning. It can, however, also be derived and confirmed from empirical observations on human passions. A social survey (in the Netherlands; 40.000 responders) based on Rokeach' value system, by and large brought about the same (overall, average) value pattern. It was defined by two statistically most significant pairs ('principal components') of contrasting value orientations: a first horizontal contrast between the subjective, individual 'I' and the objective, collective 'others' and a second vertical contrast between non-materialist mind and materialist matter (van Egmond & de Vries, 2011). This empirical survey surprisingly confirmed the two pairs of contrasting value orientations which were at the core of Plato's thinking a few thousand years earlier. As indicated earlier, in the survey the dominating attitude for the non-materialist upper half of the human nature pattern, was 'giving'; that of the lower half was 'taking'. As discussed, these observations are in support of Platonic ethics and also provide one of the explanations why the dominating value pattern tends to move in a counter clockwise direction over macro-historical periods.

A striking aspect of the survey was the over-representation (2/3) of males in the lower left quadrant. In the opposing upper right quadrant, 2/3 of the respondents were females. This corresponds respectively to the rationalist-materialist orientations which are seen as more masculine and the subjective, 'feeling' oriented values which are considered to be feminine.

Essential human nature and sustainability

The telos of the ethical framework as emerging in the centre of the essential human nature pattern appears to consist of two, mutually re-enforcing and telling principles: sustainability and consciousness development:

Sustainability

(Macro-)history and many cultural expressions thus suggests centrifugal value allocation to be considered as vice, given the observation that the shift of value orientations to the periphery time and again ends in catastrophe and un-sustainability. In contrast, centripetal value orientations appear to avoid these discontinuities and thus attain sustainability. The identified current problems in both the social (people), ecological (planet) and financial-economical (profit) domains only can be solved on a more fundamental level by shifting value orientations to the centre, or at least avoid them to shift to the periphery; 'such qualities move towards the achievement of the specifically human telos' (MacIntyre 1981 p185).

In the present situation this suggests society to shift to less material intensive and less individualist (egotistic) orientations. The centrifugal movements are identified as vices, as they move away from sustainability and are bound for disaster, in our time the ecological and in the financial crisis. So, sustainability appears as a virtue (Aristotelian mesotes) in between the many vices of the periphery. It can be said that human nature is essentially able to sustained, combining the desirable with the possible within the carrying capacity of the physical-ecological and the social system. Sustainability is the capability to maintain the dynamic equilibrium between the fundamental polarities in essential human nature.

The catastrophic discontinuities of the periphery are the consequences of centrifugal shifts in the value pattern. The deduction of 'sustainability' as an element of the telos, thus is based on 'consequentialism' rather than on (pure) virtue ethics alone. As noticed by Martha Nussbaum (1999) the demarcation between the various categories of ethical approaches in general is fuzzy. In this case the consequentialist approach, based on the notion of the vicious periphery, is complementary to the virtue ethical approach, which is based on the notion of a virtuous centre (mean). Both approaches mutually confirm each other.

Consciousness development

The centripetal shift (of value allocation) to the centre also can be seen as the synthesis of the opposites which constitute the periphery, for example the collective opposing the individual. As indicated earlier the view of psychologist Jung comes close to the concept of the Aristotelian mean in maintaining equilibrium between all kinds of opposites. According to Jung this only can be done if the self remains aware of these opposites. By bridging them, consciousness inevitably spreads throughout the entire base (of human nature) and is experienced in the middle as Self-consciousness. Apparently orientation on the centre, or equilibration over the pattern of human nature as a whole, is equivalent with consciousness development.

As discussed by Hursthouse (1999 p256) the virtue ethical conception of nature is teleological, whereas the modern, scientific one is not. In particular in Darwinism, there is no such teleology at all. However in the Darwinist process of evolution, consciousness development appears to be the underlying leading principle. It apparently is one of the most likely objectives of human development, and it thus is the most likely human telos.

Anthropocentrism

It is unavoidable that a moral framework for the Anthropocene is anthropocentric. It is the human being (anthropos) who has to redefine its moral position. There is less focus on the 'rights' of nature. However, as described by Louke van Wensveen (2000), virtue ethics will become more relevant for ecological questions. In the approach chosen here, it appears as an integral part of an ethics of sustainability.

In that virtue ethical framework, the (social) 'others' at the upper left and nature, as the physical other, at the lower left are integral parts of essential human nature. In maintaining the virtuous orientations on the mean in the centre, respect for the others and for nature will be generated implicitly. The return to a more balanced, thus essential human nature, implies a less materialist orientation, which will make room for other species in nature. It also implies a less individualist orientation which less

inclination to appropriation, leaving more room for (global) commons. In this anthropocentric view, a more sustainable situation is reached by reducing the rights of humans, not by extending the 'rights' of forests and rivers.

Practical applicability

The question remains whether the ethical system as summarized by Figure 2 (based on both virtue ethics and consequentialism) has an adequate ability to discriminate virtue from vice. Indeed, the telos is still formally defined as a mean, in this case in two dimensions, and Aristotle himself remarks in book II-9 of *Nicomachean Ethics*, that it is not easy to find the middle. He recommends that 'he who aims at the intermediate must first depart from what is the more contrary'. This difficulty in finding the intermediate (mean) reflects the human freedom to choose from many different, but still virtuous objectives. One can have a preference for the physical, rather than the meta-physical or the own ego rather than the collective and still being virtuous. Indeed, all value orientations inside the circle periphery have to be morally judged as positive. Within the circle the cohesion between the values and herewith by definition human dignity is maintained.

However, outside the circle boundary this cohesion, and herewith human dignity is lost. Single isolated values start to dominate obsessively. These many one-sided, vicious positions beyond the periphery are more easy identifiable than the precise position of the (virtuous) centre. They can be identified by their extreme one-sidedness, either to the individualist, the collectivist, the materialist-physical or metaphysical orientations:

- In the first place the current neo-liberal orientation (in the lower-right quadrant) takes extreme positions in the corresponding public-private demarcation at the level of economic means (the 1st level in figure 2). Since the '90-ties public goods and global commons have been privatized and commodified. The balance between private property and public commons, as implied by the ethical framework is lost. Small private elites have taken control over major public interests, which by definition implies a feudal society. The most outspoken example is the creation of money by private banks. According to Aristotle following Plato, 'money exists not by nature, but by law', suggesting that the law-giving democratic institutions should create the money rather than private actors. The subsequent financialization of the world is the outspoken caricature of the lower right quadrant, representing the current, one-sided Zeitgeist. The orientation has lost its cohesion with the typical human values within the circle and herewith with human dignity. It has lost its moral legitimacy and has become fundamentalist.
- The diagonal upper left orientation is fundamentalist as well. Rather than an obsessive individual-materialist orientation, the obsession here is a dogmatic caricature of the collective-metaphysical orientation as it is expressed by institutional religion. Just as Christian religions earlier in Europe's history, inherently conflicting claims are made on the universal truth, typically for the left hand side of the pattern. As argues in this paper, claims on the ultimate universal truth lack moral vindication.
- Also one-sided physical and metaphysical orientations (in the vertical direction) are to be considered as vices. The current ecological crisis is the result of over-valuation of the material qualities. Value orientations have to shift to the centre, where less material intensive, ecological sustainable conditions can be maintained. This implies less use of fossil fuels (climate change) and virgin materials (circular economy). To achieve this in the market-oriented economies of the currently dominating lower right quadrant, financial incentives such as CO₂-price and taxation on virgin material use, are the legitimate and only effective mechanisms, however not taken.
- As was concluded from the social survey, the diagonal lower left-upper right contrast (also) represents the masculine – feminine polarity. Also gender-equality thus is a pre-requisite for the reconciliation of the opposites in the centre. It is remarkable to notice that on the concrete biological level this reconciliation brings about new life, and thus new consciousness.

- The Sustainable Development Goals, which can be seen as required capabilities, partly cover the pattern of essential human nature. There are no goals which cover the upper right, 'spiritual' quadrant. More important, the ethical framework is more consistent than the set of 17 SDG's. The SDG's allow anything and forbid nothing, which is one of the explanations of their wide acceptance. The contradicting nature of several goals is ignored; it is very unlikely that economic growth can be combined with the protection of the planet and many other goals. The SDG's still ignore the limits to growth.

In contrast with the SDG's, the ethical framework does forbid certain valuations. It requires decreasing valuation of materialist and individualist capabilities and considers the extremes as immoral. The need for material growth is reduced naturally.

Conclusion

Earlier attempts of church (biblical revelation), Enlightenment (Kant) and post-modernity (Nietzsche) to find a rational justification of morality have at least partly failed as they were based on Weltanschauungen (worldviews) which covered only a specific, then dominating one sided part of human nature. In contrast, the current attempt to find such a framework is based on the integration of these earlier frameworks and associated worldviews. This integration is further substantiated by philosophical thought, empirical results of both a social survey, a (macro-) historical analysis and by cultural history. It thus encompasses all the earlier experiences and subsequent lessons of the western, at least European civilization so far and could serve as a legitimate moral compass now we reached the Anthropocene.

The moral compass is a combination of virtue ethics and consequentialism. From this combined approach a twofold, natural human telos implicitly emerged; sustainability and consciousness development. Sustainability ethics thus can be seen as the integration of important earlier ethical frameworks. Herein, sustainability appears as a process of maintaining a dynamic equilibrium between the essential faculties of human nature; between the physical and the non-(meta-) physical qualities and between the individual-private and the collective-public qualities. Such a moral compass would legitimize concrete and effective policies to curb the current development in an unsustainable direction. It repudiates the moral legitimacy of the current obsessive orientation on individual-materialist values. Restoring the balance between the essential orientations in human nature, and herewith regaining human dignity, might entail a renewed European Renaissance.

Acknowledgements

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