The virtues they needed to have

A brief history of the Virtues from Homer to Hume
and How Virtue enabled Communities to Survive and Thrive

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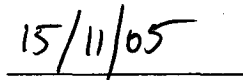
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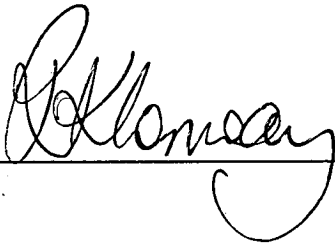
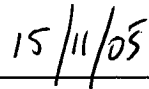Robyne Kristine Conway   Date

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THESIS ABSTRACT

In the course of this thesis, I will argue that for more than two thousand years the practice of virtue enabled the flourishing of communities and societies. Undoubtedly, virtue was the transformational process that enabled individuals to achieve certain highly desirable ends – such as happiness, pleasure or eternal life. As well as caring for the self, virtue cultivated the care of others – stimulating responsibility for family, friends and community and promoting their well-being. However, virtue also transformed individuals into the sorts of people - heroes, politicians, monks and so on - that societies and communities needed to survive or flourish in the face of the social, cultural and political circumstances of the time – and when communities flourished, so did individuals. This inextricable interrelationship existed from the earliest times of Western civilization until some point between the beginning of the Renaissance and the end of the Eighteenth Century. Over these first four centuries or so of modernity, virtue gradually ceased to be the only way of successfully living in a social group and became merely one option, among many, from which individuals could choose.

I will argue that the changes we can observe in virtue and virtues over the history were not due to fashion, arbitrary choices or moral errors. Virtues defined what was valuable about a particular society – what communities valued in their people; what people valued in their community; what people valued in themselves and in others. Virtues often correlated to the leadership skills that were pertinent to cultural, social and political circumstances. Traditional virtues were never sacrosanct; they could be reinterpreted, mis-remembered or simply left in abeyance until they were necessary again. The priority – or place in the hierarchy – of particular virtues could shift depending on, for example, whether courage, wisdom or love was most likely to lead to communal success.

This thesis raises a number of questions about the focus of contemporary virtue theory on the character, choices and motivations of the individual moral agent, and about the persistence of the notion that virtue should be universal for all times and places. It concludes by examining a number of problems, misconceptions and mistakes that are perpetuated by a lack of attention to the relationship between virtue and societal or communal flourishing. After all, as social animals, we are relational and as such, we continue to create and sustain communities. By expanding our focus on patterns found in individual character, reasoning and emotions, to include patterns found in societal or communal flourishing, a new understanding of twenty-first century virtue may develop.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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This work is dedicated to Ruth Louise Coughlan,

who is a shining example of the virtue of Friendship.

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INTRODUCTION

The current revival of interest in virtue ethics focuses attention on the character – personal disposition and habits - of individual moral agents. In the course of this thesis, I will endeavour to show that this attention to the virtue of the individual – while unsurprising in the light of modern individualism - clouds the historical reality. Virtue was – in the past - the way of living in society and this way of living had profound, mutual and reciprocal benefits for society and its individuals. This interrelationship existed from the earliest times of Western civilisation until some point between the beginning of the Renaissance and the end of the Eighteenth Century. Over these first four centuries or so of modernity, virtue gradually ceased to be the only way of successfully living in a social group and became merely one option, among many, for individuals to choose.

That virtue was the way of living and flourishing – in and of society - for these two millennia or more will be explored in the coming chapters. Virtue held a central place in philosophy throughout this period and as Hadot so eloquently argues – philosophy was in itself a way of life from the ancients to the Middle Ages.[1] Virtue may have been described, catalogued and theorised predominantly through examination of the individual moral agent, but it was always practised in the context of either society at large or a more intimate community, and sometimes both. The benefits to the individual of practising virtue, of transforming and caring for the self were always clear and overt. However I hope

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[1] Hadot Pierre, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, Trans. Michael Chase, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), pp 240-241

to show in this thesis that the benefits to society of these transformations were equally important, indeed crucial to communal stability, flourishing and in some eras were crucial to societal survival. Indeed, I will endeavour to show that virtue, the flourishing of the individual and the flourishing of society were inextricably bound up together, were mutually dependent and reciprocal.

This interdependent relationship between virtue and societal flourishing explains why the question of 'Why be virtuous?' – so necessary to modern ethical theory - seems to have been not only unasked, but also incomprehensible, in the past. People lived in societies of diverse forms, but virtues were persistently what enabled concord, order, stability, security, growth, glory and more, to be achieved – that is, societal flourishing. The constituents of societal flourishing varied from time to time and place to place, depending generally on the circumstances, problems, opportunities and crises that prevailed.

From around the time of the Renaissance and for a multitude of reasons, virtues became just one of many possible individual choices for flourishing - virtue ceased to be inevitable; it ceased to be the only means to a good life. I will argue that individual choice both came from and resulted in the breakdown or deterioration of that interdependence between virtue, individual flourishing and communal flourishing.

Over the more than two thousand-year history that I will trace in this thesis, the meaning of the word virtue changed several times. The understanding of the quiddity or whatness of virtue changed several times. The context and focus, hierarchy and catalogue of particular virtues changed repeatedly. Furthermore, the motivations for virtue changed – generally in parallel with these other changes. What did not change, until the Renaissance, and what enabled the social institution of virtue to evolve and continue without anyone needing to

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question its relevance was its function and the place and prominence it held in human life - that is in human *social* life. Virtue's function – its transformation of individuals into the particular sorts of people each society or community needed to survive and thrive – heroic, wise, faithful, obedient people and so on – was what justified its prominence and ensured its unquestioned place in human life. It turns out – I will argue - that the essences that had been so minutely examined and carefully described over the millennia were not actually what was essential to the prominence and place of virtue. It was not what virtue *was* that was unchangingly essential - it was what virtue *did*. I will argue therefore that virtue before the Renaissance and virtue since the Renaissance - and certainly since the Eighteenth Century - were not the same thing. Since at least the Eighteenth Century, virtue as we continue to know it has ceased to be the principle means to social flourishing – now other things enable Western societies to flourish. When we use Aristotle's ideas about virtue in the *Nicomachean Ethics* as a basis for contemporary virtue theory - without giving prominence to the social context and social benefits that he discussed or alluded to in the *Politics* and the *Rhetoric* - we are ignoring the fact that, for two millennia, virtue was never practised or even theorised about outside the overt or implied context of the benefits it had for society. We are also ignoring the fact that virtue does not operate now as it did in the past, because virtue – as moral excellence – is not apparently what makes contemporary Western societies flourish, in the way that they do.

The broad aim of this project has been to explore the history of virtue and the virtues.[2] This history begins with Homer, when the virtues were so clear and

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[2] Despite fascinating parallels to be found, for instance, in Buddhist, ancient Egyptian and hunter-gatherer virtues, this historical survey will – due to the time and space limitations of a Master of Arts project - focus only on what we might call the mainstream of Western philosophical and social history.

evident that they did not even need to be stated explicitly. It proceeds to the Presocratic philosophers and poets who were the first to think abstractly about the practical virtues that were implicit in Homer and who provided evidence of the transition from heroic virtues to city virtues. Then we examine the Sophists together with Socrates, Plato and Aristotle and the great dramatists of the Golden Age of Athens, who first codified the virtues, adapted them to life in the city-state or *polis* and made clear and overt the connections between virtue and the flourishing of society. The four main schools of the Hellenistic period found that the Platonic and Socratic variations of *polis* virtue were especially adaptable to life in a chaotic empire where tranquillity was the antidote to social and political alienation. Then the early Christians blended a 'new' code of virtues from the old Jewish, Stoic and Platonic ones, enabling Christianity to stand out from the crowd of competing religions and philosophical ways of life. After a lengthy silence, the theologian philosophers and a few female voices of the Middle Ages described a veritable flood of virtues that counteracted the desperation of life amid war and deprivation, and brought some order and stability to an inherently disorderly and insecure society. This was followed by the cacophony of voices and ideas about virtue that characterised the Renaissance and Reformation - now that anyone could become a gentleman, civic and gentlemanly virtues became relevant again. We witness the budding new ideas of the Seventeenth Century and the first attempts to make a science of virtue. Culminating with the Enlightenment - when virtues had become passions rather than habituated character dispositions - and the passionate eighteenth century attempts to find something real in virtue even though it apparently defied scientific explanation. The history, I find, is fascinating for its own sake. The ideas about virtue and the virtues themselves flow through the history like a great river, clearer here, muddier there, narrowing,

widening, shifting course, retracing an old course, but the continuity and fundamental consistency - until it slowly faltered - is unmistakable.

In the course of my research into this history, I became intrigued by the question of what had made virtue the compelling way of life that it had been. What was it that had changed that could cause virtue to lose its place as the way of life? Was it some inherent quality of virtue or the virtues, or was it a relationship between virtue and something else? It could not be that the essence or essences of virtue had changed, because the traditional definition of virtue as a habit or disposition that is closely associated with practical wisdom and so on continues to appear fundamentally valid today.[3] Furthermore, one would think that by definition the essence of something could not change. However, something to do with virtue had been capable of changing, and it left virtue the optional, even sometimes unattractive or derogatory thing that it became in modern times. Over these two millennia or so, virtue was consistently understood as the means for achieving what was most important to human life - honour, happiness, tranquillity or Heaven. Was it a persistent and widely held desire for these rewards that made virtue so compelling? Was it that throughout this history human life had a *telos*? In the past, people were certain that there was a purpose to human life and that this purpose was achieved through the practice of virtue. Was it living in small communities? In communities throughout this history, everyone had a necessary role to play that contributed visibly to general well-being and everyone was taught and could observe the same virtues practised by people right there in the community. Probably each of these factors − the persistent essences, the exclusive link with human *telos* and smallness of

communities - was conducive to virtue being understood as the only way of living well. However, I suggest there was another compelling factor.

The set of virtues valued in each of these historical eras consisted of three subsets: a group of virtues that remained fairly consistent throughout history; a group of virtues that took on more importance for a while than they had in the past or would in the future; and the virtues that were valued only during that one era. The full set of virtues associated with a particular era offered a specific remedy or survival response to the cultural, social and political circumstances and challenges of that particular time. Historically, virtues were not merely located in a place and time, nor were virtues just an aspect of what went to make up a society, like an architectural style or an administrative system. Virtues were not merely the means to individual flourishing (though they obviously were that too); they were the means to societal and communal flourishing. Virtue and virtues transformed individuals into the kind of people that a particular society needed to thrive, indeed in some eras, to merely survive.[4]

What do I mean by the notion that virtues became a choice and that this had something to do with the end of the necessity of virtue for societal flourishing? Obviously individuals always had a choice about being virtuous or not, aspiring to virtue or not. There was never a time in Western history when everyone had to be virtuous, or had to practice all the virtues equally. When I say that choice was the reason and consequence of the breakdown of the relationship

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[3] For example, see Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski's detailed account of what virtues are in *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the nature of Virtue and the ethical foundations of knowledge*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)

[4] The germ for this idea - that there might be a significant relationship between social and political circumstances and the changing definitions of virtue and virtues - came from reading Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy and its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, 2nd Edition, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1961)

between virtue and societal flourishing it is not this sort of choice that I mean. Throughout this history people generally had more than one notion about what virtue was – virtue was a habit, virtue was a unity (of wisdom or charity), virtue came from God, Jesus and charity, virtue was perfection of the soul, and so on. However, these ideas were not competing with each other. It was entirely possible, plausible and coherent for virtue to be a habit and wisdom, or to be a habit and an imitation of God. The aim was to find and share knowledge and understanding, not to find a single scientific principle that would explain everything. By contrast, eighteenth century ideas that virtue was all benevolence or virtue was all self-interest, that virtue was the means of societal flourishing or vice was – were candidates for a law of virtue and simply could not coexist. Indeed, they were competing opposite views and the moral agent had to decide between them. The moral agent had to choose whether or not virtue was the means to his or her own happiness – rather than power or wealth, laws or police, work or something else. Even more confronting, by the Eighteenth Century the moral agent had to choose whether virtue was real or not – given that it had failed to be successfully turned into a science.

The changes we can observe in virtue and the virtues throughout history were not due to fashion, arbitrary choices or moral errors. Virtues defined what was valuable about a particular society – what society valued in individuals, what individuals valued in their society, what individuals valued in themselves and in others, and most importantly what excellences were needed to protect and promote the society itself. Throughout the history there were also connections between virtue and honour, virtue and blame and praise, that highlighted the importance of community response to individual behaviour. Furthermore, the ideas people had about the nature of virtue and the connection between virtue and

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the *telos* of human life also provide insight into the link between virtue and the well-being of societies. Aristotle made it clear in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that virtues defined what the individual needed to flourish and that the individual must live and participate in a community. However, in the *Politics* we see that Aristotle also recognised and understood the significance and necessity of the relationship between virtue and societal flourishing, virtue and concord. We do not need to think about this relationship as a Mandevillian-style political conspiracy. Humans are social animals. People live in a social group. Each social group faces difficulties and in the past virtues reflected the behaviours, attitudes and actions that the group needed from at least some proportion of its inhabitants in order to meet or overcome those difficulties and flourish. Virtues once defined what societies needed to operate, to grow, to be successful and when the circumstances were extremely tenuous – to simply survive.

By contrast, contemporary virtue theory focuses on the character, choices and motivations of the individual. I will argue that this focus perpetuates a number of problems, misconceptions and mistakes about the nature and application of virtue. By refocusing virtue as excellent behaviours or practices that ensure societal or communal flourishing, we are faced with several possibilities. Are contemporary virtues those habituated behaviours that enable doctrines such as consumerism, free market competition, entrepreneurism and economic rationalism to persist? For we could argue that these are what enable contemporary Western society to flourish in the way that it does. Alternatively, do we need to identify the virtues associated with the present way of living that gives rise to a more genuine form of community? These and other related questions about the implications of the history of virtue for contemporary virtue theory will be examined in Chapter 11.

During my study of the history of virtue and the virtues, I identified four themes in the relationship between virtue and society.

The association between the style of virtue and the stability of society

The definition of virtue and the virtues, their essence and nature evolved in ways that maintained appropriateness to the circumstances of the society or community. For instance, we can often find a relationship between the degree of stability of the society and the degree of rigidity or absoluteness of virtue – the greater the instability, the more contingent and flexible the approach to virtue tended to be. The unity or diversity of virtue was another aspect of the definition of virtue that was linked to society, offering a second range of strategies for coping with various types of social instability and adversity.

The public elucidation and promotion of virtue

Virtues were always public values and were promoted by communal and/or social institutions, particularly educational institutions. They were always generally thought of as universal, though in fact there was never a time when all virtues were required in all people – there were always some limitations of class and gender. However this limited universalism was in no way incoherent, as virtue was always – either explicitly or implicitly, in total or in part – associated with excellence or perfection and therefore with some sort of elite group – be it nobles, philosophers or monks.

The pro-society quality of virtue

Virtues were pro-society, either directly being other-regarding or indirectly having consequences that were beneficial to others or the community in general. Virtues either promoted or encompassed the particular skills and behaviours that a society or community needed to survive or flourish. Virtues enabled the society to

overcome the dangers it faced, to survive in a hostile environment or to progress in the direction that it had chosen.

The significance of public recognition and motivation for virtue

Virtues generally only existed in the individual when they were publicly recognised and this recognition – taking the form of reputation and often some kind of honour – was a principle motivation for people to achieve or practice virtue. Other motivations, for instance associated with the *telos* or purpose of being human, with shame or with fear were also widely held public values and involved, in various ways, the public recognition of virtue or its inappropriate absence.

Each of these four themes either directly connected virtue with societal flourishing or were associated with community expectations that virtue would result in social good. We will find that the contents of each of these themes changed and evolved throughout the history from Homer to the Enlightenment. They were clear, readily identifiable and sometimes openly discussed up until the end of the Middle Ages, but with the Renaissance they began to break down, becoming slowly more difficult to find and describe. By the Seventeenth Century, some of these themes can no longer be identified and only traces of the remaining themes are evident in the Eighteenth Century.

The next nine chapters examine these four themes in the relationship between virtue and societal flourishing, endeavouring to show that virtue and virtues defined something very important about societies - they defined what excellences, behaviours and attitudes were needed for society in each era to survive and/or thrive. The virtues that were valued and promoted in each era were not merely a matter of personal choice; they were not random or accidental. The changes to virtues over this history were not due to moral error. Virtues always

had their roots in the past, just as societies did. People were generally aware of the virtues from their past – at least their recent past – and were often at pains to describe how the virtues of their day were the same and how they were different. However, we will find that they did not always have an accurate memory of those past virtues. Virtues were not valued merely for the sake of being traditional, but because they continued to resonate with and remedy the problems and circumstances that societies and communities had to deal with. Furthermore, when a virtue was not relevant to the circumstances, it simply disappeared until it was relevant again. Virtues and societies happened hand in hand. Virtues were esteemed because they contributed something important to society, because a flourishing society benefited the individuals who lived there and because individuals personally benefited directly or indirectly from the practice of their virtue.

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THE HOMERIC STARTING-POINT

Homeric values are suited to a community organized primarily
on a basis of scattered individual households. Its values stress
the prowess of the individual, and justify in the individual at the
least a considerable panache; and accordingly the Homeric
hero requires free space in which to manoeuvre.

ARTHUR W. H. ADKINS[1]

The Homeric poems are heroic stories about a glorious past. Estimates vary as to the dating of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, but they are thought to have originated sometime between the Fourteenth and Twelfth Centuries BCE and to be in their final form by the Eighth Century BCE. A mixture of fiction and history, they were the corner stone of Greek education for more than ten centuries. So we must assume they contained readily understood information or at least clear pointers about individual life in ancient Greece, as well as community life, morality, customs and the esteemed values of excellence or *aretê*. It would also be reasonable to assume that as social, cultural, economic and political circumstances changed and social structures and institutions evolved – as they did considerably over these centuries – these poems were capable of the flexibility to be re-interpreted in new, relevant ways.

The relationship between virtue and society was direct and overt in the Homeric poems. Homeric virtues were not listed in a catalogue or discussed abstractly, but were implied in the behaviour of the noble characters in the poems. Homeric virtue was closely associated with *moira* or fate and the ancient Greek perception of the world as stable and orderly. Virtues were understood to be

contingent, reflecting the small, highly vulnerable state of Homeric communities and the life and death situations faced by the hero. Virtues were public values - shared, practised and promoted by the members of a society and also promoted by the social institutions, in particular the educational institution of the Homeric poems themselves. Virtues were, as a rule, reciprocal and pro-society. They were either straightforwardly other-regarding like loyalty and hospitality, or like wisdom and courage, they had a flow-on effect of protecting or helping others. Virtues were the particular skills and behaviours that were needed for Homeric heroes to provide leadership, protection, honour and glory, wealth and security and thus enable their communities to survive and flourish. The individual achieved Homeric virtue only through the existence of public recognition, fame and reputation. Furthermore, individuals were motivated to be virtuous by their desires for personal success in the public domain and the safety and success of their families and communities at home.

The association between the style of virtue and the stability of society

There are many diverse opinions among contemporary historians and philosophers as to what skills, behaviours and personal attributes constituted Homeric virtue or excellence, that is, *aretê*. There is no neatly laid out list, nor any theoretical discussion about morality, ethics or excellence within the poems, which means the identification of qualities for a virtue catalogue is up for interpretation, both then and now. It also suggests that Homeric people had no doubt or questions about the universality of their values or the necessity of virtue. This can be explained by understanding the interrelationship between *moira*

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[1] Adkins Arthur W. H., *Merit and Responsibility: A Study in Greek Values*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), pp 75-76

(destiny or lot), *charis* (reciprocity and exchange of gifts and favours) and *aretê* (excellence or virtue).

> Homer and his hearers have the profound consciousness of a fundamental law maintaining the world's organization. They call the law Fate, *Moira*, fortune, lot, or destiny. More exactly it is the system of regulations which control the unfolding of all life; the life of men, of things, and of gods. This system secures that the world is a stable one.[2]

Aretê and the particular virtues were the means to achieving one's *moira* and a sign or evidence of *moira* in the world. Heroes had *aretê* because such was their *moira* or lot in life, and they achieved their destiny of fame and wealth because of their *aretê*, or virtue. Thus *moira* was a system of ensuring social stability and virtue was both the evidence and the instrument of that system. *Charis* was a very ancient system of reciprocity and exchange, originating with peasant survival that had required a combination of self-sufficiency (as far as possible) and exchange (for extra necessities).[3] *Charis* was clearly central to a number of Homeric virtues – hospitality, loyalty and co-operation, justice – but in fact, like *moira*, it both underpinned the value placed generally in virtue and was ensured by the practice of virtue. *Moira* will play a slowly declining role in social stability and the understanding of virtue, until it will be hardly mentioned in the golden age of Athens. *Charis* will continue to be central to the understanding of virtue and the cohesiveness of society until it slowly assumes a political expediency in the Roman Empire and then it too will cease to be overtly associated with virtue. However, reciprocity will continue to underpin virtue throughout the history.

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[2] Mireaux Emile, *Daily Life in the Time of Homer*, Trans. Iris Sells, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1959), p 28

[3] Cartledge Paul, 'Introduction: Defining a *kosmos*', in *Kosmos: Essays in order, conflict and community in classical Athens*, Paul Cartledge, Paul Millett and Sitta von Reden, Eds., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp 7-8

Homeric excellences were practical, pragmatic skills that directly contributed to the way of life, stability and prosperity of the community.[4] They were *human* ideals of excellence and would continue to be human ideals throughout the Greek and Hellenistic periods of history. It was only with Christianity that they became *divine* perfections for humans to imitate. These skills were not absolute but were contingent on the nature and circumstances of the community and the needs of the moment. For example, fighting and running skills predominated for many communities, but sailing skills were more important for others. The skills and behaviours admired during war were significantly different from those admired during times of peace. Furthermore, certain particular virtues, notably justice, were always contingent on the circumstances of the moment. Indeed, there was a day-to-day immediacy about Homeric *aretê*, which reflected and was attuned to the day-to-day immediacy of a largely land-dependent, farming-oriented community.

The public elucidation and promotion of virtue

As mentioned above, the Homeric poems provided the foundation of education for children not just for this era, but for centuries into the future. Children would have heard these stories and learned which values, skills and behaviours were esteemed by their community. They learned how people should (and should not) behave toward family, friends, community and strangers. They learned these poems and stories as representations of their cultural heritage and perhaps even their cultural future. Mireaux describes Homeric culture as 'deeply rooted in the soil' and as 'fundamentally traditional and traditionalistic'[5]. However, he explains that this was not an immobile, unchanging, entirely feudal social order,

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[4] Adkins, Op. Cit., pp 70-71

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but that hearing the Homeric poems awakened new ideas about increased wealth, expansion and possibilities for individual achievement – exemplified in the wandering hero – that will lead to the establishment of democracy and the city-state.[6] Listening to the Homeric poems, children were inculcated with an understanding of their own and others' lot in life (*moira*), the necessity of reciprocity and exchange with others (*charis)* and the behaviours and skills that were honoured and esteemed in their community (*aretê*).

The pro-society quality of virtue

The virtues of strength, speed and fighting prowess

Most commentators put strength, speed and fighting prowess at the head of their lists of Homeric virtues. It seems to me that these are foundational in the way that faith will be foundational for Christians far in the future. Faith will not be a moral virtue, but rather a fundamental requirement for being a good Christian. Further, it will be the foundation or jumping-off point for other Christian virtues such as courage in the face of lions. In a similar sort of way, strength, speed and fighting skills were basic to Homeric courage and the kind of person one needed to be in Homeric society in order to achieve the most notable reputation and fame of *aretê*. Strength, speed and fighting prowess were also indispensable skills required for the safety and flourishing of the small, vulnerable communities that the Homeric heroes protected and represented. Without them, courage on the battlefield was sheer foolhardiness.

The virtues of courage and constancy

Courage was the most prominent Homeric behavioural excellence and was central to the nobility of heroes such as Achilles and Hector. These characters

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[5] Mireaux, Op. Cit., p 259

exemplified the raw courage required for one to one combat against an opponent with renowned fighting skills, before spectators who would be quick to spread news of the result. However, the poems provided many examples of other, more subtle kinds of courage. Odysseus had the courage to abandon some of his companions in Polyphemus' cave in order to save the rest. Priam had the courage to face his own anger and disgust and the possible ridicule of others in order to reclaim his son's mutilated body, an act which restored some dignity to his defeated family and city.[7] Penelope had the courage to manage and maintain the prosperity of the homestead and keep it safe from the suitors, during the long years of Odysseus' absence.

Homeric courage was not the one-dimensional quality that it was often presented to be, even in the near or distant future. Whereas strength, speed and fighting abilities were the foremost physical capabilities required for the survival and flourishing of Homeric societies, courage – in a range of forms and situations – was the foremost attitude or disposition, and it was required for the same reasons. Courage was necessary not just for the survival of the wandering heroes, but also for the community at home that would benefit hugely from the reputation and wealth of the returning warrior. Courage was not the exclusive domain of fighting heroes - it was necessary for various sorts of people to cope with and survive a wide range of disasters, challenges and obstacles.

The virtues of self-control and wisdom

Self-control and wisdom were closely connected in the Homeric moral code. The Greek word *sophrosyne*, traditionally translated as temperance or self-control,

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[6] Mireaux, Op. Cit., pp 259-260
[7] Williams Bernard Arthur Owen, *Shame and Necessity*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p 40

actually meant *sound intelligence*[8] and it was required as the antidote to *hybris* –
arrogance, improper self-confidence or lack of respect for others. Homeric self-
control certainly did not mean an absolute lack of excess. Individuals and
communities were often highly vulnerable, so self-control rather than moderation,
together with boldness rather than modesty were crucial to dealing with the
dangers and difficulties of Homeric life.[9] Homeric wisdom was a mixture of
practical intelligence and cunning, together with control of the emotions – anger,
pride, humility, even shame – and good planning and decision making skills. This
sort of wisdom and self-control was especially needed for leadership on the
lengthy and complex projects carried out by the Homeric heroes.

Homeric virtue, success and distinction were all highly practical matters.
Homeric wisdom was very pragmatic, it centred on the capability to determine the
most desirable outcome and then devise and carry out plans to achieve that
outcome. This sort of wisdom required self-control – especially control over
anger – ingenuity, long-term focus and determination; and these were exactly the
skills which brought Odysseus great success – personally and in terms of his
project. They were precisely the characteristics that Achilles seriously lacked,
leading directly to his downfall.[10] Odysseus was outstanding for his wisdom,
understanding, determination, cunning, ingenuity and overall success. No other
Homeric hero was so consistently wise; no other hero enjoyed quite his level of
success and distinction. Likewise, Penelope demonstrated wisdom and self-
control in her long-term management of Odysseus' homestead and throughout the
siege by the suitors. The success (or otherwise) of the individual was not separate

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[8] Pearson Lionel, *Popular Ethics in Ancient Greece*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), p
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[9] Pearson, Op. Cit., pp 41-42

from the success (or otherwise) of the social group. The kin-based communities, villages and small cities portrayed in the Homeric poems were dependent on the wisdom and self-control of heroic warriors and others in charge generally for their prosperity, security and sometimes for their very survival.

The virtues of justice, kindness and hospitality

There was no abstract concept of justice in the Homeric poems; words such as *dikê* and *themis* had a variety of meanings: custom, established precedent, judgment, rule and rule of law. Justice was a respected behaviour, not an idea or a principle.[11] There was a general understanding that the universe had a certain order (associated with *moira*) and '[t]he *dikaios* [just man] is the man who respects and does not violate that order.'[12] Just men feared and respected the law and judges. Just judges respected the law and judged impartially.[13]

To be law-abiding was one aspect of Homeric justice, but there were also conventions and obligations relating to fair and just behaviour and these are of course associated with the concept of *charis* or reciprocity of favours. These conventions included hospitality to strangers; kindness to suppliants - who may be gods in disguise; and the kindness of kings toward their subjects.[14] Kindness and respect toward one's neighbours was also important. These were all traditional obligations and were illustrated frequently throughout the Homeric poems. Hospitality was not simply a matter of general fairness, it was a code that underpinned all Homeric behaviour and was a highly significant requirement for moral worth, reputation and *aretê*. Homeric justice also included the expectation

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[10] Prior William J., *Virtue and Knowledge: An Introduction to Ancient Greek Ethics*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1991), pp 19-20, 37
[11] Pearson, Op. Cit., p 47
[12] MacIntyre Alasdair, *After Virtue: A study in Moral Theory*, 2nd Edition, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p 143
[13] Pearson, Op. Cit., p 78

that if a person was wronged then they were entitled to retaliate, indeed vengeance was a requirement. Help friends and harm enemies was a general rule.

This sort of law-abiding, fair, respectful and vengeful justice – expedient, practical, reciprocal and part of a complex, utilitarian code, rather than an abstract, theoretical, ideal notion – suited the nature of the communities Homeric people inhabited. These communities were highly stratified with a complex code of etiquette for behaviour between the classes. These communities were small and provided little more than subsistence living. They had only embryonic legal institutions. They were highly vulnerable to outside threat. These communities simply did not have the resources or security to allow justice to be anything other than contingent. The contingent nature of Homeric virtues such as justice gave the hero room to manoeuvre, to do whatever was necessary for the survival of himself, his companions and his community.

The virtue of loyalty

While much of the fighting in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* consisted of one to one combat situations, there were also some larger-scale battles and situations requiring significant loyalty, co-operation and co-ordination among the group. Odysseus showed loyalty to Penelope when he declined several attractive offers from goddesses and other women. There was also an element of loyalty in the conventions of hospitality to the stranger. Pearson suggests that the 'tie of loyalty between husband and wife is no less important than the tie between host and guest'.[15] However, there are several occasions in Homer when spouses are not loyal and reputations are not ruined as a result – for instance when Helen abandoned her husband for Paris. Nevertheless, loyalty and co-operation were

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[14] Pearson, Op. Cit., p 61

often necessary for the survival of the group and the success of the hero's project. Again, the concept of reciprocity and exchange was evident in this virtue too, as was *moira* – one's lot in life - which made loyalty and co-operation an allotted obligation.

The virtue of rhetoric

Finally, rhetoric - speaking and arguing skills - was an important and admired virtue in Homeric society. Both Achilles and Odysseus were accomplished and effective speakers[16] able to convince their companions of the right way to proceed. Good leadership involved discussion, consultation and (sometimes) the gaining of consensus. Convincing leadership skills that promoted co-operation and enthusiasm for group activities and in the face of threat were clearly needed for the survival of small bands of companions and small communities with limited human and material resources.

The significance of public recognition and motivation for virtue

Not only were the Homeric virtues practically oriented to success and distinction, but the motivations for virtue were also perceived in pragmatic terms. People were generally restrained from selfish behaviour by: fear of divine punishment, human revenge, public indignation, and respect and conventional community attitudes toward the weak – women, children and the elderly especially.[17] The achievement of *aretê* was not a matter of merely staying within the boundaries of one's place in life, merely having that position, or being lucky – though all these were important. *Aretê* was not merely inherent in the character or social position; it was not just a matter of worthiness. *Aretê* existed for Homeric people only

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[15] Pearson, Op. Cit., p 62
[16] Prior, Op. Cit., p 16
[17] Yamagata Naoko, *Homeric Morality*, (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1994), pp 240-241

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when an individual's excellence was recognised by others. The link between *aretê* and fame or reputation was powerful: to be an excellent person one had to be doing the sorts of things that were admired, respected and honoured by others. In fact, excellence was really only achieved when it was recognised by the community.

Shame could be used to motivate others, for instance on the eve of a battle, but it was as the fear of being seen failing to display the virtues appropriate to one's lot that it provided the strongest motivation. It was not that everyone in Homeric times was constantly fussing about what everyone else was doing, but that shame provided a personal, private necessity for virtuous behaviour. Individuals felt that they simply could not look their companions or the members of their community in the eye if they acted in certain ways.[18]

Another important motivation that inspired Homeric people to be excellent or virtuous was the success and glory that it brought. Glory for Homeric heroes was obtained primarily through success in combat, which gave rise to honour from other nobles, and consequently fame and reputation. This success also delivered practical, material benefits in the form of a share in the spoils of war. With the glory arising from courage and fighting success, a reputation was established that could then be enhanced (or diminished) by achievement in all the other virtues. Home, family and stability of the community were important to basic survival, but glory was what principally motivated the budding young hero. Luckily, there were plenty of opportunities for glory in the poems, reminding us that that they are stories and not necessarily history. Nevertheless, they do provide insight into the vulnerability of communities in this era.

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[18] Williams (1993), Op. Cit., p 83

The ultimate motivation for virtue came from the compelling connection between the individual and his community.

> The demands of custom and the social order, the need to act 'according to one's due' and to feel shame, respect for the feelings and rights of others, beggars and wanderers included – all these demands exercise a negative restraining influence on man's behaviour. If he disregards these demands, he becomes a social outcast and deserves no mercy...[19]

This was motivation indeed. People might not do the right thing, the excellent thing all the time, but few would risk becoming a social outcast – for to be an outcast was to experience a living death. Homeric individuals identified themselves with their community – even those who wandered off to find adventure and glory – and communities identified themselves as the home of such-and-such the warrior hero.

The community's need for leadership, protection and if possible growth and increased wealth, and the hero's desire for glory, wealth and the safety of home, family and self were all satisfied by the values associated with Homeric virtue or *aretê*. In Homeric morality there was no real need for punishment – by the gods or anyone else – for not being excellent. Only excellence brought personal and societal success and, indeed, personal and societal survival.

We need to remember that the Homeric poems provide neither an accurate, nor a complete picture of life for everyone between the Fourteenth and Eighth Centuries BCE. The poets who wrote the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* came from the middle class and were in the business of reflecting praise and glory on the nobility who employed them; consequently there were many aspects of life that did not receive poetic attention. Nevertheless, there is a pattern to be found here in the close ties between Homeric virtue and Homeric social flourishing. Furthermore, I

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[19] Pearson, Op. Cit., p 48

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will endeavour to show, in the course of this thesis, that this sort of pattern – this sort of multi-faceted interdependency – continued, with some shifts and turns, throughout the next two millennia.

3

THE PRESOCRATIC BRIDGE BETWEEN HEROIC AND GENTLEMANLY VIRTUE

> Without intelligence, reputation and wealth are not safe possessions.
> DEMOCRITUS[1]

Documentary evidence of virtues and moral values is sparse during what I will call the Presocratic period – that is the period between the Homeric poems as at the Eighth Century BCE and the rise of the great Periclean age at the beginning of the Fifth Century BCE. The only philosophers to write explicitly about virtue and moral issues were Democritus and to a lesser extent, Heraclitus. Their remarks on *aretê* tended to be brief, sometimes offering quite new ideas, other times reinforcing views that were consistent with Homeric *aretê*. The evidence from the poets is also fragmentary; however along with traditional views, Hesiod, Theognis, Tyrtaeus, Solon and Pindar included in their works radical, new, but embryonic, ideas about the nature of virtue.

Fragmentary though the source material is, the relationship between virtue and society is readily identifiable. In some respects the old contingency and practical immediacy of the virtues lingered. However, there was also a new promotion of reflection and contemplation evident in the beginnings of abstract, theoretical thinking, together with an increasing esteem for wisdom and intelligence. These changes became both necessary and possible in larger-scale communities with increased security and a growing leisured, educated class. Virtues and values continued to be shared, although we will see that they were

open to discussion and adjustment. They also continued to be fostered by the educational institution of the Homeric poems. The virtue catalogue contained several changes and these are readily explained in the light of the cultural, social and political circumstances of this era. Presocratic communities, the emerging city-states, depended on farmers, soldiers and especially political, military, and naval leaders to survive and thrive – not wandering heroes – and these were exactly the roles picked out for virtue and excellence in this period. Recognition, reputation, honour and fame continued to be important, but the notion of good intention – generally considered a private matter – was discussed as a necessity for virtue. Individuals continued to be motivated by desires for personal success and by the benefits they received from a flourishing society. The people of this period were deliberately creating communities, and inventing and testing concepts and institutions that would enable them to best flourish and that depended on individual citizens behaving as 'good' – that is noble and virtuous - men.

The association between the style of virtue and the stability of society

Moira, fate, destiny, one's lot in life continued to have an important role, but a changing one, in Presocratic *aretê*. 'For *greater fates win greater shares*, according to Heraclitus'[2] merely indicates that *moira* continued to be significant. More importantly, Pearson finds in the poems of Solon and Theognis that '...the old idea of moira as a due portion of conduct has given way to the idea of a due portion of possessions.'[3] These possessions consisted in a certain level of wealth and political power, both of which the individual had more potential to influence than the old sort of social status that was acquired by birth into a particular family.

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[1] Democritus, quoted in Barnes Jonathan, *Early Greek Philosophy*, (London: Penguin Books, 1987), p 270

Moira was tied up with the possessions and status that came with citizenship in the *polis*, and the *polis* could provide these benefits if citizens contributed certain excellences to the orderly management of their city-state.

Charis was now, at least in some views (such as that of Theognis), an element of virtue that enabled *noos* – mind, where a person thinks, sometimes also having the meaning of intelligence, understanding or good-sense – to function properly. Theognis suggested that good qualities of *noos* were necessary for the virtues of wisdom, self-control and especially friendship.[4] This concern with interior reflection and thoughtfulness and the linking of it with *charis* (good will or gratitude) - which had been previously oriented to the practicalities of Homeric virtue - was possible and appropriate now. The hectic, vulnerable Homeric world had evolved into one of relative peace (albeit with intermittent and sometimes catastrophic wars) and democratic and social institution building.

In this period, the concept of *aretê* or virtue was examined theoretically for the first time. For instance, Democritus said: '[t]o be good is not to refrain from wrongdoing but not even to want to commit it.'[5] In the Homeric poems, good and bad were firmly linked to what one did, one's actions, not ever what one thought or desired - Democritus was introducing good intention as one of the necessary qualities of virtue. Nearly two millennia later, Peter Abelard will promote the idea that *only* good intentions are necessary to virtue, that good actions themselves are not what constitute virtue. However, I am getting ahead of the story. The consideration of intention as necessary for virtue was another move away from the Homeric day-to-day, immediate, active, public sort of virtue

[2] Barnes, Op. Cit., p 125
[3] Pearson, Op. Cit., p 71
[4] Pearson, Op. Cit., p 86

toward a quieter, inner, longer-term one. This was a process that – as we will see – will continue through to the Christian eras. This shift toward quiet, inner virtue corresponded to the relative absence of physical dangers and threats to personal and communal safety and the increasing level of security and stability that was experienced by – indeed was a motivation for – the developing city-states of this era. Quiet, inner virtue would have been entirely inappropriate in the face of the violence and danger confronting Homeric heroes and their communities – active, physical, immediate excellences were required. In the developing city-states of the Presocratic era, where institutions and social control mechanisms for democratic and larger-scale communal living were being worked out, quieter, more thoughtful excellences were clearly appropriate and necessary.

By this time the strong association between *aretê* and the noble, heroic warrior was still alluded to, but was gradually being converted to an equally strong association with the politically astute citizen of a city-state. For instance, Democritus wrote that '[m]en flourish neither by their bodies nor by their wealth but by uprightness and good sense.'[6] However, he was also quoted as valuing the arts of war very highly, and the arts of war still required the warrior skills of heroic leadership. This reflected the continued need for military and naval leaders and the increased scale of wars that now sometimes required participation from all adult males in the community. The Presocratic era was typical of transitional periods – offering a mixture of views and ideas that reflected both old and new values, and admiration for both the old elite skills and the new ones.

It could be argued that during this period the poets Theognis and Pindar initiated a philosophical debate that would be central to moral philosophy for

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[5] Barnes, Op. Cit., p 271

centuries. Theognis proposed the quite novel idea that *aretê* lay in justice: '[a]ll arete is included in justice... a man is good if he is just.'[7] While Pindar offered the equally contentious idea that wisdom was the key to *aretê* because it was less transient than the glory that came from bravery and was not linked with wealth and power as justice could be.[8] Many philosophers throughout the next two thousand years and beyond discuss these ideas - that virtue was contained in one of the virtues and that there was a hierarchy with one virtue at the pinnacle. No one was suggesting that wisdom or justice were foundational in the way that strength and fighting skills were the first building block in Homeric *aretê*. Rather, the idea was that all the virtues could be understood as one virtue - that somehow encompassed them all without actually eliminating the need for them all. This notion will be further developed and will become central to much of Greek thinking about virtue in the coming centuries and also to Christian thinking about virtue and charity. For now, the contributions to this debate were relatively embryonic. For instance Democritus remarked that 'Without intelligence, reputation and wealth are not safe possessions'[9], which could be extrapolated to mean that intelligence or wisdom was now the sole means of acquiring wealth and reputation and was therefore the whole of *aretê*. However, Democritus may not have intended such a sweeping interpretation.

At the time, such statements were highly provocative. Justice had always been an excellence, but it was – and continued in this period to be - a contingent value that could be sacrificed for the sake of the safety and stability of the community. Many of the great Homeric heroes had exemplified *aretê* yet had

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[6] Barnes, Op. Cit., p 285
[7] Pearson, Op. Cit., p 78
[8] Pearson, Op. Cit., p 79
[9] Barnes, Op. Cit., p 270

lacked wisdom (Achilles being a prime example), displaying cunning at best, while none of them lacked bravery. To abandon courage in favour of wisdom and to make justice indispensable were radical proposals, requiring a major shift in values and perceptions of excellence. Just such a shift was beginning in this period and was accompanied by the shifting social needs and social institutions of the new cities. People could see that their relatively peaceful, town-based communities with developing notions of government and citizenship depended on wisdom and justice for social order and flourishing – whereas an emphasis on fighting skills and physical courage was more likely to generate social disorder.

The public elucidation and promotion of virtue

These new ideas about wisdom and justice were also provocative because it continued to be the case that only certain types of people with certain kinds of skills or social roles could be virtuous – not merely anyone who was just or wise.[10] However, it is apparent that *which* skills and social roles attracted virtue could be challenged and changed, and the link with social and political needs seems clear. As far as I can determine, there were no practising farmers or non-military politicians who qualified as Homeric heroes, but the excellences associated with these social roles were now acknowledged[11] – at least by some writers – and clearly the emerging city-states could not survive or thrive without farmers or politicians.

The Homeric poems continued to be the primary source material for education, but were supplemented by the works of newer poets and philosophers. Yet it is clear from the fragments and from what we know of society and culture at this time that the Homeric poems needed to be interpreted and adapted in order

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[10] Adkins, Op. Cit., pp 78-79

to maintain their relevance. That they were not abandoned – as people created significantly new ways of living communally - indicates not merely a deep connection with tradition and the past (though it does that too) but that people were able to reorient the stories of heroism and Homeric *aretê* to a quite different kind of lifestyle. This may have been achieved by another process of abstraction – by uncovering and re-prioritising the underlying values in the stories rather than merely mimicking the behaviours of the characters. I have found no evidence for this sort of abstraction, but it would have been consistent with the theorising about *noos* and *charis*, wisdom and justice, that we can see in the philosophical and poetical fragments.

The pro-society quality of virtue

The virtue of courage

Courage as a virtue linked to fighting skills and warriors was becoming irrelevant to the Presocratic way of living and was mentioned only occasionally by some of the poets. Democritus left us two interesting ideas. The remark that '[c]ourage makes misfortunes small'[12] shifted courage from its previously fairly close relationship to fighting, to a much wider arena and made it more of an attitude to life in general than a behaviour of warriors. Whereas '[t]he courageous are not only those who conquer their enemies but also those who are superior to pleasures: some men rule cities and are slaves to women'[13] reinforces this shift, making a link between courage and self-control, as well as being an example of Democritus' consistently adverse attitude toward women.[14] The virtue of courage was not vividly portrayed in the writing of this period. Perhaps because the role

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[11] Pearson, Op. Cit., pp 73-74
[12] Barnes, Op. Cit., p 271
[13] Barnes, Op. Cit., p 271

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for courage in this transitional society was unclear. No one suggested that courage was not a virtue, but no one offered a compelling description of the sort of courage that was now deemed excellent. Furthermore my, albeit limited, study of the cultural, social and political circumstances of the period did not uncover any urgent need for a particular kind of courage from the noble, elite leadership of these developing city-states. There continued to be esteem for the sorts of courage that were linked to fighting skills, but it had diminished and I suspect this was, in part, because armies were now predominantly composed of ordinary people: soldiers rather than nobles or heroic warriors. So far in this history, and for a long while to come, ordinary people were not considered to have the potential for virtue. Presocratic virtues continued to be primarily focused on the behaviours and activities of the elite – and the group comprising the elite corresponded to those who could best protect, lead and enhance the prosperity of the community.

The virtues of wisdom and self-control

The old connection between wisdom and self-control continued in this period and was reinforced by statements such as '[a] man of sound judgment is not grieved by what he does not possess but rejoices in what he does possess.'[15] Wisdom, as outlined above, was rated very highly: '[i]mperturbable wisdom, being most honourable, is worth everything' and '[t]o a wise man the whole earth is accessible...'[16].

These statements seem to place wisdom at the head of the Presocratic virtue list and this new priority is consistent with what we know of life in the

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[14] He was also against raising children unless you can select them, already grown enough to judge their characters, from among your friends' production.

[15] Democritus quoted in Barnes, Op. Cit., p 273

period. The Presocratic period saw an emerging democracy in small cities with social institutions that had quite different needs, goals and vulnerabilities from the even smaller, kinship-based Homeric communities. Leaders were no longer warrior kings and heroes, but were politically astute citizens, some of whom doubled (when necessary) as militarily cunning generals. The role of contemplative, intellectual gentleman was on the rise and that of active, not necessarily bright fighter was on the wane.

As far as we can tell, Democritus - alone among the Presocratic philosophers and poets - was greatly concerned with temperance, self-control and moderation.

> For men gain contentment from moderation in joy and a measured life: deficiencies and excesses tend to change and to produce large movements in the soul, and souls which move across large intervals are neither stable nor content. Thus you must set your judgement on the possible and be satisfied with what you have, giving little thought to things that are envied and admired, and not dwelling on them in your mind...[17]

In addition to this relatively long fragment, there are seven other remarks that suggest why, in what circumstances and when one should practice self-control - none of which would be out of place among Stoics ideas. All of these statements resonate with the standard attitude toward self-control that will persist throughout the centuries of ancient Greek culture. Self-control was one of the 'informal social controls and protocols'[18] necessary for social order in the absence of a police force or the legislation and infrastructure of a modern State. I suggest that the absence of more widespread concern or questioning about self-control among the Presocratics was probably a simple matter of the continued appropriateness

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[16] Democritus quoted in Barnes, Op. Cit., p 271 and 276 respectively
[17] Barnes, Op. Cit., p 269
[18] Cartledge, Op. Cit., p 7

and relevance of the traditional value placed in self-control as a means of social control.

The virtues of justice, hospitality and kindness

In addition to the emerging significance of justice to the overall concept of human excellence, there were also signals that abstract theoretical consideration of justice as a virtue had begun. Heraclitus and Democritus left us fragments that indicate they were interested in the origins of justice, connections between justice and the expectations of the gods, and the traditional role of vengeance in justice.[19] However, generally speaking, the definition of justice together with hospitality and kindness and the language used to judge behaviours and dispositions was much the same as in the previous era.[20] Again suggesting that the expedient, practical reciprocal justice, hospitality and so on of the previous era continued to suit and support the culture and developing social institutions of the new cities.

The virtue of friendship

Friendship was now a virtue and we can see that it was an appropriate application of *charis* or good will/gratitude in this new Greek society, reflecting the equality that came with the concepts of democracy and citizenship.[21] Friendship between Homeric heroes and their companions often looked more like a contingent kind of co-operation, rather than friendship.[22] Friendship among the Presocratics needed to develop further if long term social order was to be achieved; it needed to involve equality and it needed to be reliable over a longer period of time than most Homeric adventures. Friendship now involved similarity of mind,

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[19] Barnes, Op. Cit., pp 124, 272 and 278
[20] Pearson, Op. Cit., p 83
[21] Pearson, Op. Cit., p 88
[22] A notable exception would be the deep and loving friendship between Patroklos and Achilles.

intelligence, a graceful character and a lack of inclination to find fault with the other[23] - all useful in a developing democracy.

The significance of public recognition and motivation for virtue

During this period, citizens generally felt an obligation to be 'good men' and to serve the state as required – this was again a matter of the reciprocity of *charis*. In return for serving their community, citizens received the important and substantial benefits and pleasures of security, public infrastructure, festivals and the pride of citizenship, which could be passed on to their children.

> Moreover, the man who refuses to serve his state is acting against his own interest. He may appear to win some temporary advantage, but in the end by damaging his country he damages himself; there can be no conflict here between the demands of gratitude and self-interest.[24]

Thus Presocratic people, like Homeric people, had crucial external, physical and material reasons for being virtuous.

Shame continued to play a role in motivating virtue and it was not dissimilar to the Homeric sort of shame. 'Even when you are alone, neither say nor do anything bad: learn to feel shame before yourself rather than before others.'[25] We could view this interior, thoughtful sort of private shame as matching the new interior, thoughtful notions about the nature of virtue – intentions, the importance of *noos* and so on - outlined earlier in this chapter. On the other hand, shame clearly had a public aspect, but Democritus was encouraging people to focus instead on a private, inner process of shame. Shame – public or private - was another of the 'informal social controls' that Cartledge alludes to that was necessary for social order – though I imagine that private

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[23] Barnes, Op. Cit., p 288
[24] Pearson, Op. Cit., p 182
[25] Democritus quoted in Barnes, Op. Cit., p 275

shame would be seen to be more suited to the dignified and affluent style of *polis* social order.

There are so few details to flesh out a picture of the values and virtues of Presocratic people, yet somehow this period and its ideas provided a bridge, a smooth evolution between Homeric morality and that of the great philosophers and dramatists of the Fifth and Fourth Centuries BCE. The scarcity of comment on the virtues suggests a continuing strong reliance on the Homeric poems as the source of moral explication. Alternatively, perhaps the Presocratics did have other things to say, but the exciting new ideas to do with science, logic, mathematics, theology, mysticism and metaphysics were simply thought more significant, more worthy of preservation.

The next period, the golden age of classical Greece, will perhaps be the most important in the history of virtue and in this period, for the first time as far as we know, aspects of the relationship between virtue and society will be openly and specifically discussed.

THE GOLDEN AGE OF THE ATHENIAN *POLIS*

*A city can be excellent only when the citizens who have a share
in the government are excellent, and in our state all the citizens
share in the government...*
ARISTOTLE[1]

The city-state or *polis* of Athens experienced its golden age during the Fifth and

Fourth Centuries BCE, peaking in the glorious Periclean era that spanned much of

the Fifth Century. The sources of information about the virtues of this period are

found in the surviving works of the dramatist poets such as Sophocles and

Euripides, the Sophists such as Protagoras and the great philosophers of the

period: Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.

The city-state was an excitingly new and largely successful social and

political development, but the Athenians were not at all disassociated from their

past.

> It was from his reading of Homer that the young Athenian in the Periclean age
> was first made to think about the why and wherefore of human conduct; and it
> was his reading of Homer and the poets of archaic Greece that fitted him to
> understand the moral issues which were presented by the great tragedians of the
> fifth century.[2]

The Athenians lived with social and political structures, religious beliefs, arts,

crafts and technologies that had evolved from those of their history. While

education of the young continued to be based on Homer, it seems apparent that

they were interpreting the poems differently from their predecessors, honing in on

different behaviours as excellences, that better suited life in the *polis*. Because it

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[1] Aristotle, *The Politics*, Ed. Stephen Everson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1332a32-1332a38
[2] Pearson, Op. Cit., p 11

was traditional and ubiquitous, this education gave everyone a 'common frame of reference' and 'models for thought and behaviour which everyone recognised'.[3] However, the Athenians were also open and receptive to new ideas and cultural change.[4]

In this period, the connections between virtue and social or political leadership were as clear and overt as they had been in the Homeric poems, although of course the sort of leader needed was quite different. To be virtuous required the type of moral education that was generally only available within the *polis*. Virtue was essentially an *ethos*, which we can translate as a personal character or a group habit or disposition to behave in certain highly valued ways. Friendship – perhaps understood as the pinnacle of moral virtue - was plainly a means of social concord, along with justice and self-control. In short, a number of significant adjustments and adaptations took place in the relationship between virtue and societal flourishing in this period.

Virtues – even previously contingent virtues, such as justice, which in the past could be abandoned in dire circumstances without any loss of *aretê* - were now defined as both absolute and flexible. According to ancient Greek logic, one was either a sage – having perfect wisdom – or not a sage, one was good or bad. However, there was also a process of becoming wise, being neither good nor bad, that was logically possible.[5] In practice, there were no circumstances under which a person could have *aretê* and be reckless for instance, but the balance between excess and deficit was to be carefully judged to suit the circumstances. This reduction in the contingency of virtue reflected the development of Greek

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[3] Webster T. B. L., *Athenian Culture and Society*, (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1973), p 64
[4] Webster, Op. Cit., p 8
[5] Hadot (2002), Op. Cit., p 46

civilisation from the small, vulnerable, unstable early communities of the past to the new, somewhat tentative developing cities of the Presocratic era and now the larger, stronger, more stable and sophisticated city-state. Virtues and values were widely shared – especially the commitment to courage, justice, wisdom and self-control – at least at a fundamental level, with the specifics of how these were best exemplified and best understood theoretically, open to debate. The Homeric poems were still the basis of early moral education, but were no longer sufficient for teaching *aretê* in the *polis* and were supplemented with a range of new educational sources. These included: private teachers such as the Sophists, the philosophical schools and at a wider, popular level, the great dramas of the period. The old virtues that were by now completely absent from the *polis* catalogue – speed, strength, fighting skills and heroic courage – had been replaced with quieter, more co-operative virtues. Truthfulness, generosity, good humour and good temper, pride, ambition and magnificence enabled, supported and promoted the institutions and aspirations of the city-state. Aristotle, for instance, identified several general relationships between virtue and society in this period. He associated virtue with living fully, participating fully in the community. As the epigraph to this chapter shows, as well as identifying the interdependencies between virtue and individual *eudaimonia* or flourishing, he identified the interdependencies between the excellence of individuals and the excellence of society. Recognition, reputation, honour and fame, together with the benefits of living in the glorious city-state, were still motivating people to be virtuous, but they had also been subsumed into the concept of *eudaimonia* or flourishing. *Eudaimonia* appears at first glance to be a *telos* for the individual to choose, but it was dependent on publicly shared values of what it was to be noble, aesthetically pleasing and honourable. *Eudaimonia* was only achievable when people lived

together in a community. Furthermore, as Hadot argues, care of the self was

never intended to imply a lack of care for the city.[6]

The association between the style of virtue and the stability of society

When Socrates questioned various civic and military leaders on the definition of

various particular virtues, he received answers that were example or situation

oriented. As he was looking for abstract, conceptual definitions Socrates found

these sorts of answers inadequate, but they betrayed the deeply entrenched

situation-based, story-based, practical, Homeric, non-abstract way of thinking

about such matters. In the *Metaphysics*[7] Aristotle reported that Socrates was the

first person to attempt this sort of abstract, conceptual definition. What he was

looking for was an essential *eidos*, an idea or form; to be a standard, a formula,

not what is the meaning of the virtue but what is its *nature*. Socrates, Aristotle

explained, was seeking *episteme*, that is, scientific knowledge. However, instead

of finding axioms that could be used to generate theorems, Socrates found

inconsistencies and circular arguments[8] - and he was not the last to face this

dilemma. As we will find, the goal of turning virtue into a science will reappear

in the Seventeenth Century and will be tackled in many ways by many

philosophers, with a similar lack of success. Socrates was not however seeking

this scientific knowledge merely for its own sake. In his view '[k]nowledge is not

just plain knowing, but knowing-what-ought-to-be-preferred, and hence knowing

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[6] Hadot (2002), Op. Cit., p 37
[7] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred, (London: Penguin Books, 1998a), 987b1-987b4
[8] Prior, Op. Cit., pp 78-79

how to live.'[9] The moral science-seeking philosophers of the future were to have a somewhat different agenda.

Socrates argued that wisdom was essential for living the good life; and that wisdom, virtue and happiness were inseparable. Furthermore, he believed that no one having knowledge of the benefits to one's soul of behaving virtuously would then proceed to behave viciously. 'To care for one's soul is to maintain its health. Right actions benefit the soul, improve its health while wrong actions mutilate or damage the soul, destroy its health.'[10] Socrates narrowed down the field of virtues to five: wisdom, justice, self-control, courage and piety, and he found that as well as being practised and understood as different excellences for different aspects and problems of human life, they were also unified in one virtue – wisdom. He based this on an argument provided in the *Meno*[11] that there are many goods, including virtue, which were advantageous – physical goods such as health and wealth, as well as spiritual goods such as temperance, justice, memory and nobility of character. However, all these things could sometimes be harmful – courage could result in injury or death for instance – and only *right use*, which came from knowledge or wisdom, ensured these goods were beneficial. Socrates concluded:

> If then virtue is one of the things in the soul and if it is necessary for it to be beneficial, it must be wisdom, since all the things in the soul in themselves are neither beneficial nor harmful, but become beneficial or harmful with the addition of wisdom or folly. By this argument if virtue is beneficial it must be a kind of wisdom.[12]

For Plato, wisdom did not equate to virtue in general. Instead, he saw wisdom, in the utopian *Republic,* as the domain of that very small class of citizens, the

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[9] Hadot (2002), Op. Cit., p 33
[10] Prior, Op. Cit., p 71
[11] 87d quoted in Prior, Op. Cit., pp 86-87
[12] Plato, *Meno*, 88c-88d quoted in Prior, Op. Cit., p 86

guardians, who would rule the rest and decide how the state dealt with itself and with other states. Wisdom was the highest virtue and it controlled everything and everyone. Plato devised a set of four virtues: wisdom, self-control, courage and justice that will echo throughout the millennia as the Cardinal Virtues. This construct will be notably reinterpreted by the Hellenistic philosophers, the early Christians and even the very Aristotelian St. Thomas Aquinas.

Plato - ignoring the early dialogues, which are generally considered to be his portrayal of Socrates' views – did not offer an opinion of the essence of virtue, *per se*.[13] In the *Republic*, Plato explored the connections between justice, the good individual and the good society. He found that a person needed to have justice if they were to be happy. Further, he found that justice enabled the other three virtues (temperance, wisdom and courage) to grow. Justice – not interfering in other people's business – existed when people did the right sort of naturally befitting work, which they would do if they were brave, wise and temperate.[14]

For Aristotle, practical wisdom or understanding was what people needed in order to deliberate and choose the right, mean action – that is the mean between two extremes. For instance, courage was the mean between an excess of recklessness and a deficit of cowardice. No one could be morally virtuous without practical wisdom and no one could be wise without moral virtue.[15] Nevertheless, for Aristotle, wisdom was not the essence of virtue. He undertook a

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[13] In fact, Plato did not explicitly define the Norms, the Forms, Reason, the Good or Beauty either, 'for all these things are inexpressible in language and inaccessible to any definition. One experiences them, or shows them in dialogue or desire; but nothing can be said about them.' See Hadot (2002), Op. Cit., p 75

[14] Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, Trans. I. A. Richards, (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1948), 427-433

[15] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Trans. David Ross, Revised by Ackrill and Urmson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998b), 1144b30-1144b32

comprehensive analysis of the essence of virtue and as we shall see below, his approach to the question was quite different.

These three perspectives offered an interesting range of arguments and nuances about the nature of wisdom, but there could be no doubt that they all placed wisdom firmly at the pinnacle of the virtue hierarchy. Virtue and particularly wisdom were necessary to the management of the state and the home. For the Greeks of the *polis*, that men congregated in cities and the existence of governments were self-evidently useful and naturally leading to the good life. While many of the virtues in the *polis* were traceable to the Homeric poems via the Presocratic adaptations, and were often discussed in Homeric terms, they had shifted in emphasis and priority. Presocratic virtues had expanded in their scope to accommodate a more co-operative and sophisticated way of living. Periclean Athens did not need independent heroes, it needed collaborative negotiators and decision-makers. The over-arching leadership quality needed in the *polis* was not fighting skill or courage - it was wisdom.

Aristotle argued that the essence of virtue was not something virtuous like wisdom, but rather a disposition of the human character. Moral virtue was a state of character[16] or habit that exhibited an acquired disposition to choose the intermediate between excess and deficit that was right for the particular circumstances. Only people in certain circumstances could acquire this disposition. Aristotle explained that children did not have the maturity to reflect on moral problems, nor the power to make moral choices. Likewise, women and slaves did not have the power or freedom to make moral choices where it mattered

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[16] Aristotle (1998b), Op. Cit., 1106a10-1106a12

most - in the public domain.[17] On reaching a certain level of maturity and education, the young adult (i.e. young male citizen around the age of twenty) was in a position to begin the process of learning, practising and deliberating on virtues, virtuous choices and virtuous actions, which would be a life-long pre-occupation. The *intermediate* was not some fixed and repeatable rule simply to be applied consistently.[18] Rather, it was a variable somewhere on a continuum between the utmost excess and the utmost deficit, which must be gauged specifically for each situation requiring a moral choice. This calculation must consider not just the components and dynamics of the problem itself, but the needs and status of the other people involved, the moral agent's own particular needs and circumstances at the time, and consideration of the full panorama of virtues or behavioural excellences.[19] One could not find the right intermediate of courage without also, to some extent, balancing wisdom, justice, self-control, good humour and so on.

This notion of virtue being a balance was also portrayed in the tragedies. Antigone was especially wise about one thing (piety), she was brave and determined, but she certainly was not prudent in many other ways – she lacked balance and she died horribly. Likewise, Oedipus lacked balance – he was impulsive rather than temperate, clever at solving riddles but foolish when it came to other matters – and his fate of two living deaths was even worse.

The notions of balance and harmony will become centrepieces of thinking about the good life in the next period and were to be much admired, adopted and adapted by the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment. For the classical era the idea of

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[17] Aristotle (1998b), Op. Cit., 1111b4-1111b6
[18] Aristotle (1998b), Op. Cit., 1106b36-1107a1
[19] Aristotle (1998b), Op. Cit., 1106b18-1106b23

balance, finding an appropriate middle ground between excess and deficit - together with the promotion of life-long practice and habituation of virtue - provided mechanisms for social order and control that the city-state - undertaking its grand experiment in democracy and citizen participation in government - needed.

The transition from *aretê* as centred on the excellence of the affluent male hero to excellence centred on the affluent male politician/citizen, or perhaps the male philosopher, begun in the Presocratic era, had been fully realised by this period. *Aretê* 'entails skill in managing one's own household and in transacting the affairs of the state. The end in both cases is clear and desirable: prosperity and stability.'[20] The end for heroic virtue also had been prosperity and stability, though it was counted in different goods – safety from attack, cattle and kin-based community property. Prosperity and stability for Presocratic society had involved the nurturing and development of new ideas and new social constructs, as well as protecting new kinds of material wealth that were in transition from the Homeric assets. Now prosperity and stability was counted as graceful affluence, slaves, comfortable private houses, a glorious culture, commerce, industry, remarkable public institutions and an unprecedented 'international' reputation.

The public elucidation and promotion of virtue

Hadot explains that '[t]he flourishing of democratic life demanded that its citizens, especially those who wanted to achieve positions of power, have a perfect mastery of language.'[21] We can see this emphasis played out in various ways: in the new educational techniques of the Sophists; in Socrates' insistence on uncovering the essential truths about concepts such as virtue, wisdom, piety and

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[20] Adkins, Op. Cit., p 278

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so on; and in Aristotle's vigilance in exposing equivocation and his careful use of analogies and metaphors to communicate his ideas. All these concerns about language were not for the sake of linguistics, but were aimed at developing the communication, persuasion and argument development skills and general leadership of citizens, for the benefit of their city-state.

The dramatists vividly and popularly portrayed the virtues and the connections between *aretê*, wisdom and flourishing in this period. For instance, by killing that stranger at the cross-roads, even without knowing it was his father, Oedipus showed an excessively quick temper and a lack of wisdom. Lack of wisdom in some things and cleverness in others, to say nothing about lacking knowledge of the predictions made at his birth, caused Oedipus to carry out those strange predictions and to be ultimately reduced to blindness and exile. The dramatist was showing his audience that not only did Oedipus need the exterior goods of luck and destiny for success, but he needed to contribute wisdom and the other virtues as well. It was his own and his parents' choices and actions, their lack of wisdom that led to Oedipus' fate and his downfall, and this lack of excellence had awful consequences.

Ideas about virtue, justice, honour and so on were also promoted and indeed ritually rewarded by religious cult associations. Worshippers at local temples vied to earn praise and honour awarded - at formal ceremonies for virtuous behaviour -by the leadership of the temple community. In this way, non-citizens and resident aliens esteemed and practised the same sorts of virtues as

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[21] Hadot (2002), Op. Cit., p 13

elite citizens, ensuring that many people contributed to the informal mechanisms for social stability that virtue provided.[22]

The opening statement of Aristotle's definition of virtue implies a direct relationship between individual virtue and community.

> Virtue, then, being of two kinds, intellectual and moral, intellectual virtue in the main owes both its birth and growth to teaching (for which reason it requires experience and time) while moral virtue comes about as a result of habit, whence also its name *(ethiké)* is one that is formed by a slight variation from the word *ethos* (habit).[23]

Aristotle's use of the word *ethos* is particularly interesting. Within the *Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle used two words that are routinely translated as *habit:* these are *ethos* and *hexis.* The Greek word *hexis* is frequently used within the text and it has a wide range of meanings to do with the normal, ingrained way of behaving for both animate and inanimate things. For instance, it is the *hexis* of fire to burn things. However, it is also the word for an individual's habitual behaviour and state of mind. The word *êthos* had a social customs dimension, which gave rise to the contemporary definition of the English word *ethos,* as the 'characteristic spirit, prevalent tone of sentiment of a people or community, the "genius" (disposition, prevailing character) of an institution or system'[24]. In the *Rhetoric,* Aristotle outlined 'the *characters* of men in regard to their emotions, habits *(ethos),* ages and fortunes.'[25] He indicated that habits of virtue were not merely the habits of the individual, but were also habits shared by social groups – the young, the elderly and the middle-aged. For instance, he described the social

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[22] Arnaoutoglou Ilias, 'Between *koinon* and *idion*: legal and social dimensions of religious associations in ancient Athens' in *Kosmos: Essays in order, conflict and community in classical Athens*, Paul Cartledge, Paul Millett and Sitta von Reden, Eds., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp 78-80
[23] Aristotle (1998b), Op. Cit., 1103a11-1103a16
[24] Murray James A. H. and Others, Eds., *The Oxford English Dictionary*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), Vol. V, p 426
[25] Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, Trans. H.C. Lawson-Tancred, (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 1388b31

group 'youth' as habitually having the virtues of ambition, being sweet natured, magnanimous and as having a preference for 'doing what is noble to what is in their interest'[26]. Youth, as a group, also tended to excess – lacking control over bodily appetites and temper, being rash and bashful, rather than courageous and confident, and so on. Acquiring the habits of virtue was not a straightforward matter of each individual developing their own personal habits of virtue. Groups within the community were disposed to a particular subset of the complete range of virtues depending on circumstances - age, wealth, power etc.

Ethos meant both individual and group habits, but the same word pronounced slightly differently – *êthos* – meant 'abode, dwelling place... the region in which a man dwells'[27]. Indeed, Heidegger argues that this *êthos* or abode was the place that 'contains and preserves the advent of what belongs to man in his essence.'[28] In other words, it was the most suitable, appropriate and proper place for human habitation – not a private place, but a familiar place where people live together.[29] This suggests that the very words being used by the ancient Greeks to discuss moral virtue were a constant reminder of the interplay between society and virtue. An experience many people subsequently failed to notice because the words – *êthiké, ethos, êthos*: morality, habit, place where people live together well - do not all share a common root in Latin or English. The words *ethos* and *êthos* retained their etymological connection into Latin – *habitus* and *habito* – as well as into English – habit and habitat. However, the translation of *êthiké* to *virtus* meant the connection between virtue and dwelling place became indistinct. There is a parallel between this linguistic connection in

[26] Aristotle (1991), Op. Cit., 1389a32
[27] Heidegger Martin, *Basic Writings*, Ed. David Farrell Krell, (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993), p 256
[28] Ibid.

the Greek words and the Chinese word for virtue. Wong writes that the Chinese word for virtue – *jen* – consists of two characters: the character for a man and the character for two, signifying a group. Thus, the very composition of the word establishes an inextricable relationship between virtuous behaviour, the individual and the social group.[30] This might explain why the ancient Greeks did not often feel a need to analyse or discuss the relationship between virtue and society – it was obvious to them from the words they were using.

The proper human abode - the place where people could live well - was the *polis*. It is clear in Aristotle's work that the *polis* was the place where human flourishing was achieved and where virtue was practised.

> [I]t is only within the *polis* that the life of *eudaimonia* can be lived out, and thus it is in and through the life of the *polis* that the virtues are exercised. Moreover, apart from the education afforded by the *polis*, especially the better kind of *polis*, human beings are incapable of the rationality required for virtue.[31]

This interpretation implies that only those people who experienced an advanced education in the particular social, cultural and political circumstances that comprised a certain kind of *polis* – such as Periclean Athens - were capable of the wisdom or reasoning to be virtuous. Aristotle's statements on this issue appear to be somewhat ambiguous. Aristotle may have been arguing that it was only within a *polis* setting that moral education facilities were available, at this point in time - not that it was only within the particular socio-political institutions and the particular mode of community of his *polis* that moral virtue could be learned. A number of disparaging remarks were made about the Homeric poems in this era, but nowhere was it suggested that virtue or excellence had not existed prior to this sort of *polis* – a possible extrapolation from MacIntyre's statement about

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[29] Heidegger (1993), Op. Cit., p 258
[30] Wong David B., *Moral Relativity*, (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 1984), pp 154-155

eudaimonia and the *polis* quoted above. The Greeks of Athens, except for the audiences of the historian Herodotus, were not particularly interested in the virtues and values of other societies with which they came in contact. However, this could be for a number of reasons other than a belief that foreigners had no virtue at all: loyalty to the city-state and its values, lack of detailed anthropological information, or simply a normal preoccupation with their own affairs and a sense of the irrelevance of other people's values. Moreover, Aristotle did not live in a city-state in the latter part of his life; he lived in an empire. Nowhere did Aristotle suggest – in the writings that survive - that with the demise[32] of the Athenian *polis* there was no more possibility of virtue. Like Socrates, the Stoics will find virtue – that is perfect virtue – extremely rare in the next period, but this rarity will not be because they do not live in a city-state. Taking a different perspective, Heidegger suggests that the *polis* was not a particular form of political system – a city-state – but the 'abode of the essence of [Greek] humanity'.[33] The *polis* was the place of abode that best suited humans and where they were allotted their correct place.[34] It was the place where orderliness was found, which is not to say there was no disorder, but that this was where assignments and arrangements for human living were made.[35] The *polis* was both the place and the way of people living together – the community not the political structure as such.[36] Therefore, the term *polis* encompassed the simple Homeric community as well as the sophisticated Periclean city.

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[31] MacIntyre Alasdair, 'Virtue Ethics', in *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, 2nd Edition, (Routledge NY: Becker and Becker, 2001), p 1758
[32] I do not wish to imply there was cultural demise, it was a political, military and diplomatic demise, see Arnaoutoglou, Op. Cit., p 69
[33] Heidegger Martin, *Parmenides*, André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz Trans., (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), p 90
[34] Heidegger (1992), Op. Cit., p 92
[35] Heidegger (1992), Op. Cit., pp 92-93
[36] Heidegger (1992), Op. Cit., p 96

Aristotle highlighted another aspect of the public promotion of virtue, when he said:

> [F]or legislators make the citizens good by forming habits in them, and this is the wish of every legislator, and those who do not effect it miss their mark, and it is in this that a good constitution differs from a bad one.[37]

Aristotle expected this aim to be shared by all legislators, regardless of the particular form of government operating within a state or empire, not just the legislators of the Periclean sort of government. In *The Politics*, Aristotle examined the similarities between the good life for the individual and the good life for the state. He concluded that the life of excellence, of acting well – that is virtue – 'is best for each individual, and for states and for mankind collectively.'[38] Indeed, he defined the state not merely as a place where people live side by side, but as 'the union of families and villages in a perfect and self-sufficing life, by which we mean a happy and honourable life.'[39] A happy and honourable life was an excellent and virtuous life. Aristotle set out to show that the contribution of noble actions - that is, personal and political excellence, which were essentially the same and achieved by the same means – was far more important both to society and to the individual than noble birth or wealth.[40] The excellence of the individual and the excellence of the state were mutually dependent. An excellent *polis* needed mechanisms for social control and virtue in general, in conjunction with several of the particular virtues, was a prime candidates for meeting this need.

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[37] Aristotle (1998b), Op. Cit., 1103b3
[38] Aristotle (1988), Op. Cit., 1325b30
[39] Aristotle (1988), Op. Cit., 1280b40-1281a1
[40] Aristotle (1988), Op. Cit., 1281a1-1281a8

The pro-society quality of virtue

The virtue of courage

By contrast with the previous era, there was now a considerable depth to the discussion on courage. For everyone except Plato, the association between courage and the battlefield had been discarded. Oedipus' ultimate act of courage was to blind himself and then go into voluntary exile - something like two living deaths. Antigone went to her horrible death with similar courage. These actions were necessary to restore social stability and maintain the rule of law respectively. Aristotle explained that courage, as a virtue, referred to feelings of fear and confidence - which were both appropriate responses depending on the circumstances. Aristotle debated whether poverty and illness were things we ought not fear as they did not generally stem from our own vices, but he concluded that to be fearless of these was also to be brave. Furthermore, '[t]here are some evils, such as disrepute, which are proper and right for [a man] to fear and wrong not to fear'.[41] However, he gave most credit to courage in the face of what is most terrifying to a person and death seemed to Aristotle to be that most fearful thing.[42] In the *Republic*, courage was the domain of the soldier class, however these soldiers were very different from the heroes of the past. The soldiers of the *Republic* were to be educated and trained – we might say indoctrinated - to fear only those things the state wished them to fear.[43] This courage sounds rather mechanical, automatic and a matter of soldiers doing merely what they have been taught to do and what they are required to do by law. Aristotle's lengthy argument against courage being about behaviour on the

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[41] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Trans. Martin Ostwald, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1962), 1115a11-1115a12

[42] Aristotle (1998b), Op. Cit., 1115a6-1115a25

[43] Plato, Op. Cit., 429-430

battlefield was possibly aimed at repudiating this idea. But Plato also said 'that the soul possessing elevation of thought and the contemplation of the whole of time and being will not view death as something to be feared'[44] – a perspective on virtue and fear that was paradoxically to be central to Epicureanism in the next period. Courage in facing one's own fears and even the courage of the professional soldier were quieter, more controlled than the courage of a warrior-hero. Periclean courage matched the needs and social structures of the *polis,* where the flamboyant, independent courage of the Homeric hero would have been destabilising and inappropriate.

The virtue of self-control

Like his predecessors of the last two eras, Socrates closely connected self-control with knowledge. Xenophon explained that

> [H]appiness begins with a certain sort of self-sufficiency, which is gained by ruling over one's desires. This self-control is the origin of gentlemanly virtue, which Socrates defines as knowledge about human concerns, such as what is holy and what impious, what is noble and what shameful, what is just and what unjust, and so on.[45]

While recognising pleasure as good, self-control for Aristotle was concerned with how people dealt with physical pleasure and to some extent pain, for both themselves and others – the balance between insensibility and self-indulgence. A 'temperate man is so called because he is not pained at the absence of what is pleasant and at his abstinence from it'.[46] An excess of feeling about pleasure or pain resulted in self-indulgence, while an absence of such feelings would be insensibility. Aristotle considered pleasure a thing to be guarded against, because

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[44] Hadot (2002), Op. Cit., p 20
[45] Stephens John A., 'Friendship and Profit in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*' in *The Socratic Movement*, Ed. Paul A. Vander Waerdt, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), p 209
[46] Aristotle (1998b), Op. Cit., 1118b35-1118b36

people tend not to judge pleasures impartially.[47] These notions about self-control were quite consistent with those of the previous era. This suggests that the value and expectations placed on self-control that had been adapted from the Homeric tradition to suit the Presocratic societies continued to meet the needs of the city-state for a level of personal control and conformity that would preserve social order and stability.

The virtue of justice

Socrates proposed a radical innovation – a compelling argument that doing evil to another person, friend *or* foe was always unjust[48]. Vengeance had always been (and continues to this day to be) some part of justice and punishment for crime. Even if Socrates' argument did not prevent vengeance from being the prominent element of justice it was for most of Western history until well into the Middle Ages, he did raise an important question that would resonate in thinking about justice throughout those centuries. More relevant for this thesis, Socrates 'thought that it was impossible to be just by oneself. If one was just all by oneself, one ceases to be just.'[49] This might seem obvious, but the concept of justice had in previous eras been a contingent and largely personal matter – obtaining one's due portion through whatever reciprocity was needed - together with traditional respect for laws, rather than a matter of communal well-being, *per se.*

Aristotle explained that justice was 'complete because he who possesses it can exercise his virtue not only in himself but towards his neighbour also...'[50]. This raises the question of what Aristotle intended by the word *complete*. Did he mean it was complete because it benefited both parties involved in a dispute? Did

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[47] Aristotle (1998b), Op. Cit., 1109b6-1109b9
[48] Vlastos Gregory, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, (Ithaca N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp 196-197

he mean it was complete because it benefited the individual, his neighbour (i.e. opponent) and the concord of society as a whole? Alternatively, did he mean it was complete because a person needed to exhibit courage, wisdom, truthfulness, generosity and all the other virtues, in order to be just? Regardless, the concept of justice reached a new height of sophistication in this period, reflecting and complementing the new sophistication of the governmental and legal systems of the *polis*. Furthermore, Aristotle declared it was the reciprocity of justice that held people and cities together[51]. All these new ideas about justice were occurring in the context of the development of the first comprehensive justice system – the shifting of justice from a 'tribal' code to an institutional 'civic' code. The intention behind this social development was plainly a desire for increased stability and the prevention of social conflict.[52]

The virtue of piety

Piety was the principal theme of the *Antigone* and of Plato's *Euthyphro*, and it was the first of three virtues mentioned in the *Heraclidea*:

> There are three *aretai* which you must practice, my child. Honour the gods, your parents, and the common laws of Greece, and in so doing you will have forever an excellent, *kallistos*, garland of *eukleia*; fair fame.[53]

Furthermore, 'Aeschylus has the chorus in the *Agamemnon* say that only impiety, not wealth, brings divine punishment'[54]. Each of these examples reflect the increased importance of religion in Periclean Athens compared with earlier times. Piety was also of major concern for Socrates, alone among the philosophers. Despite being a 'deeply religious man' and despite the fact that flouting the

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[49] Merleau-Ponty quoted in Hadot (2002), Op. Cit., p 37
[50] Aristotle (1992b), Op. Cit., 1129b35
[51] Aristotle (1992b), Op. Cit., 1132b36
[52] Schofield Malcolm, 'Political friendship and the ideology of reciprocity' in *Kosmos: Essays in order, conflict and community in classical Athens*, Paul Cartledge, Paul Millett and Sitta von Reden, Eds., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp 38-39

religious consensus was 'an offence against the state punishable by death'[55]

Socrates created his own definition of piety and defied centuries of belief about the role and behaviour of the gods. He claimed that piety was not mere respect for the gods and respect for religious ritual, but that '[p]iety is doing god's work to benefit human beings'[56]. This might have been a comfortable idea for Jews or in the future for Christians, but it was an astonishing idea for the ancient Greeks. Piety, religion and religious ritual were important social institutions in the *polis* and 'Honour the gods' was a very ancient axiom, but the idea that piety was a virtue – an excellence - expressed by Socrates and some of the dramatists was controversial and somewhat ahead of its time. For when religion and piety were state matters, they would surely be considered norms rather than an excellences. On the other hand, the social stability and order that derived from piety and the practice of religion were apparent, so it was consistent to make piety a virtue along with the other informal mechanisms for social control.

The virtue of generosity or liberality

For Aristotle, generosity or liberality was a virtue associated with money, wealth, and material things and it was particularly concerned with giving them in the right way and with obtaining them from the right sources.[57] Generosity was the balance between meanness or stinginess and prodigality or extravagance. Aristotle noted that it was generally thought that people who inherited their wealth were more inclined to be generous, as they had never lived without and they felt less attached to their money, not having earned it themselves.[58] This virtue seems

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[53] Fragment alleged to belong to the *Heraclidae*, quoted in Adkins, Op. Cit., p 176
[54] 744-754 quoted in Prior, Op. Cit., p 22
[55] Vlastos, Op. Cit., p 158
[56] Vlastos, Op. Cit., p 176
[57] Aristotle (1998b), Op. Cit., 1119b20-1120a10
[58] Aristotle (1998b), Op. Cit., 1120b10-1120b13

to be a logical adaptation of the conventional hospitality and kingly generosity that were Homeric virtues, suited to the affluence of the elite classes of the *polis*. Part of the glory of Periclean Athens was that people travelled long distances to see this unprecedented art, culture and philosophy for themselves. A pervasive tone of generosity and hospitality would clearly make Athens even more impressive, as well as being appropriate to the gentlemanly aspirations of the elite.

The virtues of magnificence, pride and good temper

Aristotle's virtue of magnificence, the balance between niggardliness and tastelessness was also to do with money, but in the sense of spending money well, using money to make life beautiful and tasteful for the sake of honour, rather than for the sake of showing off or obtaining things cheaply.[59] Homeric heroes (who were almost by definition also wealthy and noble) spent their money on adventures, which brought glory to themselves and their homes. By Aristotle's time, money was spent to bring glory to individual citizens and to their great *polis* by acquiring tasteful, aesthetically pleasing homes, possessions and entertainments. We should note that magnificence was not viewed as an independent virtue – one could not have *aretê* from being magnificent without having all the other virtues.[60]

Hubris had long been a vice for the Greeks, but for Aristotle, there was a proper virtuous sort of pride - the pride of feeling worthy of the things one genuinely deserves. As with magnificence, people only deserved to be proud when they were good in all the other virtues.[61] Proper pride was the mean between undue humility or thinking too little of oneself, and empty vanity or

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[59] Aristotle (1998b), Op. Cit., 1122b5-1122b10
[60] Aristotle (1998b), Op. Cit., 1124a1
[61] Aristotle (1998b), Op. Cit., 1123b1-1123b3, 1123b29-1123b31

thinking too much of oneself. Another Aristotelian virtue related to honour was the unnamed median between striving too much for honour, status or wealth and not striving enough. Aristotle saw this proper sort of ambition as being related to proper pride in a similar manner to the relationship between generosity and magnificence.[62]

The virtue of gentleness or good temper was concerned with managing anger and was the balance between apathy or undue meekness and short temper. Aristotle explained that this did not mean never being angry, rather that one should be angry for the right reasons, with the right people, in the right manner and for the right length of time.[63]

The links between these virtues and societal flourishing are clear. Proper pride, ambition and good temper would be highly desirable, indeed necessary qualities for citizens participating in the government of their *polis* and holding positions of power. Without magnificence and pride the city-state would not hold its glorious place in the world, it would not advance or be seen to advance. Without gentlemanly good temper, political and judicial arguments would be violent and endless, and democratic decisions would never be reached.

The virtue of friendliness or good manners

Aristotle's virtue, unnamed but resembling friendliness, involved general good manners towards everyone. It was behaving appropriately to strangers as well as people one knew[64] and with a sense of honour and politeness.

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[62] Aristotle (1998b), Op. Cit., 1125b1-1125b7
[63] Aristotle (1998b), Op. Cit., 1125b31-1125b35
[64] Aristotle (1998b), Op. Cit., 1126b19-1126b27

It was a balance between grouchiness or quarrelsomeness and obsequiousness.

> He will behave differently toward eminent men and toward ordinary people, toward those he knows well and those he knows less well, and he will observe similar distinctions in his behaviour, paying the proper tribute to each.[65]

This sort of conduct was quite consistent with the conventional manners and rules of hospitality that were Homeric virtues and with the respect required to maintain the stratified social structure of the *polis*. Friendliness and good manners would also be invaluable to the orderly processes of democratic, participatory government in the city-state. We will find in the next chapter that good manners will (arguably) comprise the public face of virtue in the Hellenized Roman Empire. Even later, in the Renaissance, people will debate whether good manners in fact comprise virtue.

The virtue of truthfulness

For Aristotle, the mean associated with boastfulness and mock modesty was nameless; but it was primarily truthfulness and included having appropriate motives and not pretending to be something other than what one was[66]. Truthfulness *per se* had not been a virtue in the past, although boastfulness, part of hubris, had always been a vice. For Homeric heroes, success in their adventures often involved deceiving people about their intentions and/or identity. Life in the relatively quiet and leisurely *polis* did not require this sort of deception; indeed it would be destabilising and would prohibit the orderly conduct of political and commercial business.

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[65] Aristotle (1962), Op. Cit., 1126b35-1127a2
[66] Aristotle (1998b), Op. Cit., 1127a23-1127a27

Recognising that life included leisure and amusement as well as serious activities, Aristotle found tasteful good humour to be a virtue[67] - it was the mean between boorishness and buffoonery. This was perhaps another effect of living in the *polis*, which is not to say there was no humour in the Homeric poems, but there does not appear to be too much relaxation in between the battles, journeys, ordeals and adventures. Life in the *polis* was far more leisurely and affluent, and good humour, as exemplified for instance by Socrates, clearly made a valuable contribution to co-operative, participative, city living.

The significance of public recognition and motivation for virtue

While virtue in the home was considered important and necessary, virtue in public life received the major proportion of analysis and consideration. Honour and honours received from the display of virtue were highly sought in the religious domain[68] and the political domain.

Socrates claimed in the *Apology* that care of one's soul – which was inextricably bound up with care of others and care for one's city[69] - was the most important human task and that this care was achieved through virtuous actions, indeed the soul was damaged by vicious ones. 'By basing ethics on the care of one's soul, Socrates provides the strongest motive for moral action; he makes right conduct a matter of the greatest importance for each individual...'[70]. Aristotle took the view that all things had a good mode of living or operation - a good flute was tuneful, a good oak had healthy green leaves and produced acorns. Furthermore, the good human was one who lived the life of *eudaimonia*, one who

[67] Aristotle (1998b), Op. Cit., 1127b33-1128a1
[68] Arnaoutoglou, Op. Cit., p 79
[69] Hadot (2002), Op. Cit., p 38

achieved the *telos* of happiness or flourishing – the good, happy, aesthetically pleasing, honourable, noble life - and the means to this flourishing was the practice of virtue. To function well as a human was to habitually practice the virtues, and the habit (*ethos*) of virtue was bound up with the community and social groups within the community.

Shame was still a motivation of sorts, but I would argue that this period saw a decline in shame's importance. Aristotle saw it as a way for young people to learn from their mistakes and I think shame was the motivation for Oedipus' final dramatic and tragic actions against himself. Nevertheless, motivation primarily came from the interdependence between the virtues and *eudaimonia*. By living virtuously people were living well, caring for the health of their souls, achieving honour, wealth and nobility, and because they were living well – being healthy, wealthy, honourable and noble - they were able and disposed to practice the virtues.

The shift in emphasis for virtue - from Homeric action in the here and now, to Periclean consistency of character over a lifetime – could occur because society was experiencing relatively secure conditions, seemed to have a long-term outlook and needed reliable sorts of behaviour to reinforce that stability. Intermittent feats of independent heroism would have been destabilising for this sort of orderly and secure society. In addition, the relatively affluent and stable socio-political conditions of the *polis* meant there was a shift in focus or expectation from merely surviving to living well. 'We ought to make not living, but living well the most important thing' said Socrates[71]. Living well involved

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[70] Prior, Op. Cit., p 71
[71] *Crito* 48b quoted in Prior, Op. Cit., p 70

nobility – with all its connotations of excellence, beauty, elegance and grace, as well as moral rightness.[72]

> Now the wise men say ... that heaven and earth, gods and men are bounded by community and friendship, order and temperance and justice; and that is why they call this whole universe the 'world order'...[73]

Virtue, community and order were inextricably connected in this Athenian experience of the *kosmos* as an orderly, beautiful world. Knowing how to live well, living gently with each other, responding in an excellent way to the circumstances faced - these were central to the pride and glory of the golden age of Athens. To be virtuous was to satisfy both internal goals relating to accomplishment and fulfilment in one's own particular life, and at the same time to satisfy the goals of one's society – goals of order, stability, magnificence and so on.

We can see that the relationship between virtue and societal flourishing had been direct and intense throughout these first three historical eras from Homer to Periclean Athens. In these times, people defined and understood themselves largely in terms of their community or society. For Homeric people this inextricable relationship between virtue and societal flourishing was a matter of plain survival, with some added advantages of possible increased wealth and glory. For the Presocratics, it was a blend of survival plus flourishing in terms of growth and development of a new kind of democratic, city-state way of living together. For the Athenians, the relationship was even more overtly a matter of order, stability, growth and glory, of living well, not just surviving. In each case, the relationship was mutual and reciprocal between individuals and their society.

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[72] Prior, Op. Cit., p 70
[73] Plato, *Gorgias*, Terence Irwin Trans., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 507e5-508a4

Throughout these three eras, virtue and the responsibility for societal flourishing came about through the transformation of individuals into the sorts of people - mostly leaders – that society needed: heroic warriors, military leaders and gentlemanly politicians. Over the next fifteen hundred or so years, we will observe a gradual – but certainly not evenly progressing – shift toward what we might call the 'democratisation' of virtue. The close associations between virtue, societal flourishing and elite, leadership roles will decline, and other sorts of people will be practising virtue and contributing to the communal flourishing.

The reciprocity that gave so much structure to virtue and relations between people in these last three eras will develop in two distinct directions. One development is a public mode of patronage that had much to do with politics, power, influence and money and little to do with virtue as such. The other will be a quiet, relatively private mode of reciprocity that will manifest as small, close-knit circles of friendship among the Hellenists and later, small close-knit Christian communities. Reciprocity; the apparently innate tendency of humans to depend on each other and to practice division of labour; and the adaptation/adaptability of modes of reciprocity and modes of virtue, were – I will argue – central to the existence and continuation of the relationship between virtue and societal flourishing.

Meanwhile, within a very short space of time, the Athenian *polis* lost its glorious independence and found itself part of an empire. During the next period, ideas from this golden age will undergo remarkable transformations to meet the needs of dramatically different social and political circumstances. Encompassing the short-lived Macedonian Empire through to the rise of the Roman Empire was the Hellenistic period – during which the various empires adopted, adapted and promoted Greek values, ideas and ways of thinking. This next period is not just

interesting for its own sake, it is also essential to understanding how ideas about virtue progressed from the classical Greek world to the Christian world, and to understanding and contextualising the marvellous 'new' ideas about virtue of the eighteenth century Enlightenment.

5

Hellenistic Tranquillity, Wisdom and Endurance

Just don't go on discussing what sort of person a good person
ought to be; be one.
Marcus Aurelius[1]

This period spanned the Third Century BCE to the First Century CE, overlapping

with Aristotle (who died in 322BCE) at the beginning and the career of Augustus

at the end. It encompassed the rise and decline of the Macedonian Empire and the

rise of the Roman Empire. Throughout this period, moral philosophy and ideas

about virtue were dominated by Greeks and Greek ideas - even though Alexandria

and then Rome, rather than Athens, were the official cultural and political centres.

The proponents of these Greek ideas and ideals were four highly influential

schools of philosophy – the Cynic, Sceptic, Epicurean and Stoic schools – each of

which propounded ways of thinking and living virtuously.

All these schools were deeply concerned with the problem of living a

moral life that was tranquil - free of fear and anxiety. The Cynics aimed to be free

of fear through the rejection of all conventions and indifference to material

goods.[2] The Sceptics held that anxiety stemmed from trying to decide what was

truth, from being dogmatic and expecting to be certain about the nature of things.[3]

The Epicureans sought freedom from anxiety via the physical discipline of living

rather frugal, moderate lives and the mental discipline of avoiding activities that

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[1] Marcus Aurelius, *Against Catiline*, 10.16, quoted in Sharples R.W., *Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics: An Introduction to Hellenistic Philosophy*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p 132
[2] Hadot (2002), Op. Cit., pp 108-109
[3] Sextus *PH* 1.12 quoted in Sharples, Op. Cit., p 114

would incite the passions, such as parenthood or politics.[4] The Stoics hoped to achieve freedom from anxiety through personal orderliness, balance with nature and consistency of character.[5] The Epicureans and the Stoics explicitly connected the desired life of serenity with the life of virtue; and all the schools connected the attainment of tranquillity with certain ways of defining wisdom. These ideas, stated very briefly, appear to be quite different from the values of the city-state as described in the previous chapter. Indeed, a number of significant changes took place in this period – to the understanding of what virtue entailed, how it was practised and where it was recognised. However, we shall see that these sorts of ideas developed directly from and were fairly consistent with many of those earlier ideas and ideals. For instance, the Epicureans and Stoics expanded on Socrates' ideas about the unity of virtue. They perceived the particular virtues to be highly unified - not just in their equation between virtue and wisdom, but even where particular virtues such as courage, friendship, humility and cheerfulness were described, the interdependencies with wisdom and endurance were highly apparent and important. The whole focus of virtue in this period was – I will argue - united in the effort to endure chaos and difficulty, and manage or avoid fear, and this plainly made sense as a response to the chaotic, difficult and fearful circumstances of the time. Education, and moral education in particular, continued to be crucial to the ways of living propounded by each of the schools and association with them required the choice to live in a particular way. The virtues of wisdom, courage and justice had become even quieter than they were in Periclean Athens and they promoted the survival (physical, emotional and

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[4] Sharples, Op. Cit., pp 84-88
[5] Long A. A. and Sedley D. N., *The Hellenistic Philosophers: Volume 1 Translations of the principal sources with philosophical commentary*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p 377

political) of individuals and small groups, each alienated in various ways from the wider society. At the same time, these particular virtues avoided conflict with Imperial society and enabled the goals and activities of the centralised, despotic powers of the Empire to continue. The overt narrowing of the scope of the everyday relationship between virtue and society – to the individual within a small community rather than the wider society - and the rise of friendship as a principal virtue was another significant adjustment reflecting the survival needs of the time. Most individuals had little or no control over the decisions or values of the Empire – but they could participate in a smaller community. The motivations for virtue continued to be teleological and associated with public values that linked virtue with an honourable, excellent human life. There was increased importance for the care of the self that featured in the previous era, but it appears to have become more closely linked with care for one's friends rather than care for the city. During this period, individuals made monumental contributions to public building, infrastructure and entertainment[6], but these gifts appear to have been more acts of political power and lobbying than acts of care for the city or acts of virtuous generosity.

The association between the style of virtue and the stability of society

Some insight into the meaning of *aretê* in this period can perhaps be gleaned from the Stoic word for the non-virtuous, non-sage majority – *phauloi*. This meant 'inferior and ordinary rather than wicked or vicious'[7] suggesting that the word *aretê* continued to hold its meaning, at least to some extent, of excellence or nobility. According to MacIntyre, Stoic *aretê* was essentially a singular

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[6] Veyne Paul, 'The Roman Empire' in *A History of Private Life, Volume 1, From Pagan Rome to Byzantium*, Paul Veyne Ed., Arthur Goldhammer Trans., (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London,

expression; an all or nothing matter that required unfailingly right judgment.[8] However, I suggest this was largely true for the Epicureans, Cynics and Sceptics as well - virtue generally consisted in a way of thinking, the knowledge of certain principles, or wisdom. In this respect, all four schools seem to have taken as their starting point the Socratic view that virtue was unified in wisdom. Furthermore, none of the Schools developed or promoted a comprehensive catalogue of particular virtues in the way that Aristotle had done. I will endeavour to show that – at this point in history - the Socratic and Platonic virtues were more compatible with and capable of adaptation to needs for individual and communal flourishing than were the citizenship and politically oriented Aristotelian virtues.

For the Cynics, virtue was the wisdom to discard all conventions and desires. For the Sceptics, virtue was the wisdom to avoid dogmatic thinking. For the Epicureans, virtue was the wisdom to contemplate the pleasures of life and avoid all unreasonable pains. This wisdom was 'even more precious than philosophy; and it is the natural source of all the remaining virtues'.[9] Moreover, for the Stoics, virtue was the wisdom and will to live in harmony with Nature and 'possession not just of individual true judgments but of *truth* - a systematic body of moral knowledge'[10]. Consistent among all the Schools was the notion – again Socratic in outline if not in detail - that happiness, wisdom, and virtue were equivalent. Happiness came from a sense of tranquillity. This tranquillity or absence of fear and anxiety was achieved through a certain kind of wisdom that was also virtue. It was only the means of achieving this tranquillity or absence of fear and the kind of wisdom aimed at that varied from school to school.

England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), p 95
[7] Long and Sedley, Op. Cit., p 427
[8] MacIntyre (1984), Op. Cit., p 168
[9] Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus* 131-32 quoted in Long and Sedley, Op. Cit., p 114

Furthermore, personal tranquillity was the only resort of people who realised that they were 'completely incapable of helping to remedy the corruption of the city'[11]. Practising a philosophical way of living – alone or with friends – was the only solution.[12]

The Epicureans were frequently criticised – by their contemporaries and ever since - for deliberately avoiding active, public life while the Stoics were renowned and praised for their participation in public life. Stoic participation was in fact not being active for the sake of virtue or even for the sake of one's society. Rather, it was cheerfully playing one's role and taking care to ensure this activity would never impinge on the 'preservation of one's inner freedom'.[13] In fact, both Stoics and some Epicureans undertook political leadership roles, but they did so with an intention of indifference to the material pleasures and political honours that this participation offered.[14]   Hadot explains that the appeal of Plato's philosophy for the Hellenists was that he had advised his students that while they waited to govern the ideal city, they should devote 'themselves to a disinterested life of study and spiritual practices.'[15] The Empire was a chaotic place, where anything could happen, where truthfulness and honest dealing were not the norm. Taking a role in public life could result in great wealth or great loss of wealth - due to the public building and infrastructure projects, public events, amusements and feasts that politicians were expected to fund. Only a relatively small

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[10] Sharples, Op. Cit., p 105
[11] Hadot (2002), Op. Cit., p 94
[12] Ibid.
[13] Prior, Op. Cit., p 214
[14] Hadot (2002), Op. Cit., pp 94-95
[15] Hadot (2002), Op. Cit., p 60

proportion of the aristocracy was involved in public life and the rest did not necessarily want to be involved.[16]

The Stoics created the term *cosmopolis* – mostly used in relation to Rome – meaning world-city and implying that Rome contained people and marvels from all over the world, as well as the notion that '[t]he world and the city of Rome occupy the same space'.[17] This concept suggested that citizens of Rome were citizens of the whole world; that the security of the city extended throughout the world; and that the whole world was managed 'as if it were one *polis*'.[18] Nevertheless, the notion of *cosmopolis* did not entail the participatory rights and obligations that citizens had enjoyed in the pre-Imperial *polis*.

Social conditions during the Hellenistic period were very different from the relatively stable and manageable conditions of the city-state. Ordinary individuals, pretty well wherever they lived in the various Hellenistic empires, had little or no personal security, although with money and no desire for personal power they could potentially live comfortably. While virtue had been self-oriented in the previous periods - in the sense of requiring the honing of physical skills, intensive personal development and reflective voluntary choices - it was now also self-oriented in other ways. The social and political chaos that began with the upheaval of the later period of the Hellenistic Empires and continued with the centralisation of political decision-making in the Roman Empire gave rise to an enormous sense of social and political alienation. The Hellenistic focus on the moral individual who was isolated from the context of the city should not be thought of as individualism as we understand it today. Rather it was an

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[16] Veyne, Op. Cit., pp 95-100

imposed, enforced, highly undesirable separation of the individual from any useful intervention in the social and moral values of his city. Even the Stoic Emperor Marcus Aurelius experienced this sort of alienation and 'expressed feelings of impotence in the face of his subjects' inertia and lack of understanding'.[19] Nevertheless, Stoic virtue was – in line with traditional Greek thinking - a matter of living harmoniously with the universe and in friendship with one's loved ones. Stoic self-sufficiency was not a matter of living in complete isolation – either physically or emotionally, it was instead a matter of cultivating indifference to things that one could not control and having great love for one's friends. In a similar vein, the Epicureans avoided contact and participation with the general society, yet gave great value and attention to their own community in the Garden.

In order to survive, actually and politically (it was very easy to lose one's life trying to intervene in decisions made by the central authorities), many individuals dedicated themselves to living relatively obscure rural lives and the management of their estates. This was not a replacement of the old moral sphere, but a reduction. In the previous period, the good management of one's home had been as morally important - although less publicly visible - as the good management of the *polis*. The Hellenistic situation could generally be construed as a retreat from public life and the corruption of the city, though by the Fourth Century CE and perhaps earlier, it was also a tactic for limiting attendance at

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[17] Ovid, *Fasti* 2.684 quoted in Edwards Catherine and Woolf Greg, 'Cosmopolis: Rome as World City', in *Rome the Cosmopolis*, Catherine Edwards and Greg Woolf Eds., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p 3
[18] Ibid.
[19] Hadot (2002), Op. Cit., p 94

banquets and gatherings of the powerful.[20] Virtues now reflected the needs of

small, friend-based communities and the antidote to these times was not fighting

skills and heroism, citizenly leadership, orderliness and flexibility, but wisdom

and endurance. The value placed on endurance was also a response to the long-

held view of the Greeks and Romans that their society was decadent – that is soft

and extravagant - that people were generally unable to resist any luxury or

lasciviousness. It was thought that this softness was dangerous to the survival of

individuals and society at large.[21] The Stoic and Epicurean promotion of

endurance, indifference and avoidance of 'false' pleasures seem to have been

directly aimed at countering this perceived deep-seated threat to the future of their

society.

The public elucidation and promotion of virtue

The abandonment by the Cynics of all conventions and trappings of society was a

deliberate rejection of their society's values and needs. At least this was the way

it was commonly perceived by contemporary commentators and subsequent

historians. However, given a context of the social chaos and dangers of the era,

the Cynics could be seen as taking a positive and moral stand against the

prevailing social and political values and circumstances. This stance could also

be viewed as a means of enduring the social and political alienation that came

from the effective removal of citizenship rights and the ability to make any

practical contribution to the government and leadership of society.

Likewise, the Epicureans were frequently criticised for refusing to

participate in the public institutions that gave them security and other social

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[20] Brown Peter, 'Late Antiquity' in *A History of Private Life, Volume 1, From Pagan Rome to Byzantium*, Paul Veyne Ed., Arthur Goldhammer Trans., (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), p 274

benefits. However - aside from not being entirely true - given the circumstances _ of the time this criticism seems either unreasonable or a matter of expecting *polis* citizenship behaviours and attitudes in quite different circumstances. This was after all, an empire 'founded on and protected by violence'.[22] Centralisation of both political decision-making and the management of public institutions made a nonsense of democratic participation as it had been understood in Periclean Athens. 'The Greeks always believed that surpassing strength and prowess were the natural basis of leadership: it was impossible to dissociate leadership and *areté*.' [23] However, by the Hellenistic period, this association had been stretched almost to breaking point and only a subtle relationship between virtue and leadership remained. Virtue continued to be associated with gentlemanly standards that were not applicable to everyone and - as in Homer and throughout the history to date - 'the nobleman educates others by presenting to them an eternal ideal'.[24] The Stoics and the Epicureans were deeply concerned with educating themselves and their adherents, and providing models for the others in their society.

For the Stoics and Epicureans, exercises that promoted and enabled self-awareness were essentially ethical - transforming the 'being, living, and seeing' of the individual. These widely practised exercises of care of the self required awareness of one's moral state and would provide a tradition for what the Christians later called examination of the conscience.[25]

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[21] Veyne, Op. Cit., p 178
[22] Brown Peter, Op. Cit., p 246
[23] Jaeger Werner, *Paideia: the Ideals of Greek Culture*, Trans. Gilbert Highet, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1945), p 5
[24] Jaeger, Op. Cit., p 7
[25] Hadot (2002), Op. Cit., p 198

The pro-society quality of virtue

The Hellenistic writers of this period - unlike their predecessors, but in common with the early Christians - had little to say about most of the particular virtues beyond the fact they existed and that they were associated with wisdom and/or endurance. Nussbaum offers an explanation for this when she says of the Stoics:

> We see here no positive concern for social justice, no generosity to one's fellow human beings, no courage for friends or country.... What courage can there be, if poverty, slavery, loss of loved ones, and even death are not to be counted evils and there is no fear to manage? What commitment to justice can there be, if the goods distributed within society have no real human worth? Again, what generosity? The only virtue that can exist here fully is, perhaps, *sôphrosunê* construed as knowing and keeping one's proper place in the scheme of things.[26]

This could readily be said of the Epicureans also, for when 'the good is easily obtained, the terrible easily endured'[27] there was perhaps little need for courage, justice or generosity. However, there *were* in fact identifiable virtues in this period, although they were certainly less vividly or comprehensively described than they were by the philosophers and dramatists of Periclean Athens. I would also disagree with Nussbaum on the matter of self-control or *sophrosune* – there was more to it than passively sticking to one's 'proper place'. Certainly Epictetus wrote: 'we must remember who we are and what is our title, and try to regulate our proper functions to suit the possibilities of our social relationships...'[28]. However, self-control was also a matter of good discipline, seemliness, modesty and moderation[29], qualities that were consistent with the traditional Greek insistence on the importance of this virtue. Self-control was necessary to: Epicurean management of desires; to Stoic cultivation of indifference; and to elite Roman notions of superiority demonstrated by highly controlled mental and

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[26] Nussbaum Martha C., *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), p 470
[27] Sharples, Op. Cit., p 7
[28] Epictetus, *Discourses*, 4.12, 15-19, quoted in Long and Sedley, Op. Cit., p 425

physical deportment. However, Nussbaum may be technically correct, there seems to be an absence of specific and detailed discussion on self-control as a virtue *per se*.

Sharples argues that Marcus Aurelius was encapsulating the whole Hellenistic philosophy when he wrote 'Just don't go on discussing what sort of person a good person ought to be; be one.'[30] This puts the absence of any detailed examination of the particular virtues in a different light from Nussbaum's and also explains the absence of theorising about a reductive essence for virtue in this period. The people of this era apparently wanted to give primacy to being virtuous, learning virtue, practising and habituating virtue, making writing about it or contemplating its essential meaning secondary. This suggests a return to an intensely practical approach to virtue, also perhaps evidenced by the wealth of material Hadot and Foucault draw on in their studies of techniques for care of the self. However, as we will see, this return to a less theoretical approach did not mean a return to Homeric virtues. The needs of Hellenistic communities were very different.

The virtue of courage

For the Stoics, courage was associated with endurance, confidence, high-mindedness, cheerfulness and industriousness. These latter characteristics or behaviours seemed to be quite different things from Homeric bravery on the battlefield, or even Aristotle's bravery in the face of the fear of death, any death. Aristotle had implied that courage was more of a mental, internal thing than a physical display, but Hellenistic endurance did not necessarily involve managing a fear at all, rather going about one's business in an accepting and useful way.

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[29] Long and Sedley, Op. Cit., p 373

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The need for management or even better, avoidance of fear - in such circumstances as the Hellenistic people found themselves in – is clear. Courage was also needed to assume and persist with a life of self-sufficiency and indifference to everything except moral intention.[31]

The virtue of justice

Epicurean justice was purely instrumental – a social contract designed to avoid personal disturbance and anxiety. The Stoics had little to say about justice *per se*, except that it was a matter of piety, honesty, equity and fair dealing,[32] and justice was 'the virtue of resisting the temptation to be partial to one's own cause.'[33] As Nussbaum argues in the passage quoted above, when there was no value placed in material goods and no evils to be feared, there was little requirement for anything other than a basic, instrumental justice. Prior writes that

> The *polis* was a form of social organization in which the individual could indeed make a difference, by arguing effectively in the assembly or by standing his ground in battle. In the Macedonian Empire this was no longer true. Only those close to the emperor could hope to influence public policy; others could only bear the consequences of decisions they had no role in shaping.[34]

In general, this was also the case for individuals living in the Roman Empire. When the individual could not influence the decisions of governments and administration, nor influence the justness of social institutions, this personal and instrumental sort of justice enabled the individual to avoid inappropriate risk-taking and enabled those in power to get on with whatever they were doing. Furthermore, a centralised, despotic government could not survive or thrive if significant numbers of individuals insisted on seeing their own concept of justice done.

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[30] Marcus Aurelius, *Against Catiline*, 10.16, quoted in Sharples, Op. Cit., p 132
[31] Veyne, Op. Cit., p 45
[32] Long and Sedley, Op. Cit., pp 377-378
[33] Prior, Op. Cit., p 218

The virtue of piety

As in the city-state, piety was most important as a means of social order - supporting the legal system in keeping the masses just and fair.

> [Roman religious cults] comprised no moral teaching. None the less social morality was thought to be linked with belief in the gods; take that away, said Cicero, and worship will be neglected, piety and religion will disappear, and then, (who knows?) good faith, human solidarity, and justice.[35]

By encouraging the individual who was not living a philosophical life to be just – or face the retribution of the gods - piety continued to be a relatively quiet, informal means of social order and stability.

The virtue of humility

There had always been a limit to Greek pride beyond which hubris lay, but the Stoics were the first in the Greek tradition to eschew pride altogether and make humility a virtue. The *Manual* of Epictetus contained many warnings against pride in one's possessions, one's eloquence, learning and learning ability, even one's choice of lifestyle. Prior asserts that '[t]he reasoning behind this seems to be that it is unreasonable to take pride in things such as wealth and status that are not in our power and that taking pride in one's own attitudes, which are in one's power, conflicts with the ideal of detachment.'[36] Another way to interpret this virtue is that whereas personal possessions, good taste and magnificence might have contributed to the glory of the *Empire*, they did not contribute to the glory of Epicurean and Stoic *communities*. Even eloquence – so long a matter of citizenly importance and pride - was peripheral when one could not influence political

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[34] Prior, Op. Cit., pp 195-196
[35] Brunt P. A., 'Philosophy and Roman Religion' in *Philosophia Togata: Essays on Philosophy and Roman Society*, Eds. Griffin Miriam and Barnes Jonathan, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp 178-179
[36] Prior, Op. Cit., p 219

decisions. Furthermore, if one's lifestyle was counter to the values of those in power, then pride was not just inappropriate, but downright dangerous.

The virtue of cheerfulness

Aristotle's anger management virtue of good humour was discarded by the Stoics in favour of cheerfulness – a very different matter. For Aristotle, good humour was a strategy associated with leadership and anger management. One could be angry for the right reasons, toward the right person, for the right duration of time – otherwise one should be good humoured. For the Stoics, cheerfulness was the face one put on acceptance and endurance of all things, including those things that incited anger and those things that seemed neutral. In other words, there were *no* good reasons or occasions for the Stoic to be angry and Aristotle's good humour virtue was redundant. This seems to be an appropriate strategy. Displaying anger was highly dangerous if the individual had no social or political power - it did not obstruct the progress of a despotic, centralised government; nor did it resolve the social and political alienation of the individual living in the Empire. Moreover, if one happened to be in a position of power, then cheerful acceptance and endurance were an admirable and useful leadership style.

The virtue of friendship

Friendship was an important Hellenistic virtue for Stoics and Epicureans. Ancient *charis* – reciprocity of gifts and favours, and mutual benefit – were evident and there was (not surprisingly) a close connection between friendship and wisdom.[37] 'The man of noble character is chiefly concerned with wisdom and friendship. Of these the former is a mortal good, but the latter is immortal.'[38] However, how could friendship be so important to the Epicureans when it risked the disturbance

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[37] Sharples, Op. Cit., p 119

of tranquillity? It was understood that the benefits of friendship outweighed the risks and furthermore, Epicureans did not have the view that it was possible or desirable to avoid *all* risks, merely that they should be minimised and chosen carefully. For Epicureans, friendship was seen to bring a long term, mutual pleasure – one of the right sorts of pleasure.[39] The Stoics also considered friendship and wisdom to be closely connected. With echoes of Aristotle, they considered friendship to exist only between virtuous people and a matter of the 'sharing of life's wherewithal' and of treating others as ourselves.[40] In general, Hellenistic friendship was central to the sense of community, and it was not limited to relationships between equals. There were many unequal friendships as well, for instance between patrons and clients who trusted in a future and not necessarily well-defined reciprocity.[41]

The significance of public recognition and motivation for virtue

The Hellenistic motivations for being virtuous continued to be associated with perceptions of the purpose of human life. For the Epicureans this *telos* was a proper human pleasure, controlled and modified by wisdom and temperance. For the Stoics, the human *telos* was a proper function, a balance between natural impulse and appropriateness.[42] Epicureans were therefore motivated to be virtuous because virtue was the means to their idea of the good human life – enjoying the right sort of pleasures. Stoics were motivated to be virtuous because virtue was the means to living a balanced, natural and appropriate life. Each of these motivations entailed a survival strategy for dealing with the social and

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[38] Long and Sedley, Op. Cit., p 126
[39] Sharples, Op. Cit., pp 119-120
[40] Diogenes Laertius, 7.124 quoted in Long and Sedley, Op. Cit., p 432
[41] Veyne, Op. Cit., pp 103-105
[42] Diogenes Laertius, 7.108-9 in Long and Sedley, Op. Cit., p 361

political chaos, uncertainty, unreliability and the lack of personal power for most citizens of the time.

However, clearly, the adoption of the values of any of the Hellenistic schools also meant that the individual was withdrawing, to a lesser or greater extent, physically, emotionally or both – from public life and the wider society. MacIntyre argues that Stoicism was a response to the loss of community – because the *polis* no longer existed.[43]   I offer an alternative view for consideration. The Stoics and Epicureans retained a central place for virtue by redefining it and the boundaries and nature of community, given the loss of the *polis* and in response to the Empire in which they found themselves. I would argue that this withdrawal actually enabled the centralised Roman Empire and empire-building activity to flourish - without the hindrance of intervention by individual citizens and without the costs of varying local institutions and reinventing wheels. This is not to say that the Schools endorsed the values of the Roman Empire – the Epicureans, Sceptics and Cynics certainly did not and the endurance and indifference of the Stoics implied an arms-length sort of participation and endorsement. It could well be that this Imperial society would not have grown and flourished, in the way it did, if everyone demanded their old citizenship rights to virtuously participate in public decision-making. Furthermore, the Roman Empire had significant success at colonising the known world. People were sent to live in strange foreign countries and were required to survive considerable martial, political and social challenges. The definition of excellence in this era was exactly what the Empire needed to achieve such success – a willingness to cope with great difficulties through personal tranquillity,

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[43] MacIntyre (1984), Op. Cit., pp 169-170

endurance, and an overarching intention of avoiding or overcoming fear. The ethics and virtues of the Hellenistic period present us with the first human response to life in a large, complex society where individuals had little or no control, power or influence over social, economic and political decisions and events. The Hellenistic development of ethical systems that focused on endurance, acceptance and personal tranquillity in a social situation that was fraught with chaos, complexity and remote autocratic decision making, suggests that the Hellenistic virtues transformed individuals into the type of people that Hellenistic society needed. People who cultivated courage and endurance, self-control and moderation, wisdom and indifference, to be practised *quietly*, with humility and no insistence on power or personal rights, were exactly what the Roman Empire needed to thrive.

However, before the end of this period and well before the end of the Empire, a new phenomenon – Christianity – began to change the face of virtue again. As we will see in the next chapter, perhaps despite common perceptions, this was not a whole new system of virtue or morality. Jewish values and ideas, Hellenistic influences on contemporary Jewish thought and (in particular) Stoic ideas will be remarkably visible and significant in the early Christian practice and understanding of virtue.

THE EARLY CHURCH – ASSERTING MORAL DIFFERENCE

Making morals means making community.
WAYNE A. MEEKS[1]

The development of the relationship between society and virtue entered a new phase with the early Christian era. Not only were the notions of virtue and the particular virtues that were valued important to the success of these communities, but the very existence of a morality that was perceived to be radically different was crucial to the attraction of Christianity and the cohesion and development of its communities. Curiously, this view of significant difference between Christian morality and the moral codes of everyone else was widely accepted, even though most of the ideas and values incorporated into that morality were a synthesis of older ideas and values.[2] Furthermore, there never was a clear cut, singular, universally accepted definition of what Christian morality entailed.[3]

This era spanned about the first four hundred years of Christianity from the Gospels and the letters of St. Paul, through the beginnings of the institutionalised church to St. Augustine. Early Christian morality was an amalgam of Jewish, Stoic, Cynic and Platonic (or Neo-Platonic) concepts, complicated or perhaps facilitated by the Hellenisation of Jewish morals and thinking during the proceding two centuries.

We find in this era that the elements of the relationship between virtue and societal flourishing have shifted again. The general relationship bears many

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[1] Meeks Wayne A., *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), p 5
[2] Meeks, Op. Cit., p 84

resemblances to that of the Hellenistic era, which is not surprising as the Roman Empire spanned both these periods. Nevertheless, the early Christian movement created a new focus for virtue, redefined the particular virtues, redefined the human *telos* and what leads to happiness, and created or re-prioritised motivations for people to be virtuous. There were many discussions among the early Christians about the unity of the virtues - in charity - and the dependence of all the other virtues on charity was clearly important. However, there were also several particular virtues that were vitally important in their own right – notably faith and humility. This suggests that being fairly single-minded was essential to the survival of early Christian communities (as it had been to the Hellenistic schools which were single-minded about wisdom and endurance), but so was being different from mainstream – that is Hellenistic – ideas about virtue. There was not one single, clear-cut moral vision held by all Christians, even in this earliest phase, but there was universal acceptance of their difference and their alienation from the rest of society.[4] Certainly there was universal belief among Christians that they were 'chosen ones' and that they were acting on God's orders, but what this entailed, how it was to be interpreted and implemented was by no means universally agreed. Theological and moral education was central to the early Christian development of community and identity. Some of the most important virtues in this period involved new ways of thinking about personal and communal identity and behaviour – such as charity, faith and humility - while others were directly linked to communal survival – such as hospitality and almsgiving. The scope of the relationship between society and virtue continued to be confined to the individual within a small community. This was consistent with

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[3] Meeks, Op. Cit., pp 215-216

the general Hellenistic situation, but the importance of friendship had metamorphosed into a concept to do with love of God, fellowship with the faithful and an impersonal love of humanity. The motivations for virtue continued to be teleological, although the Christian idea of the human *telos* involved a new way of achieving happiness. Nevertheless, we should remember that the Stoics and Epicureans had also developed new ideas about the human purpose so the Christians could be seen as part of a general trend. The early Christians practised private exercises in the tradition of care of the self, and supplemented them with public exercises of admonition, shunning, penance and so on.

The association between the style of virtue and the stability of society

One of the most interesting things about the Christian style of virtue was – as we shall see – that it was understood to contribute to general social stability as well as the orderliness, stability and flourishing of their own communities. Furthermore, it was a crucial means of survival for the embryonic Church as a whole. The differentiation of their moral vision from that of mainstream Greek and Roman ethics was exactly what attracted converts, fed their sense of alienation and provided cohesion for the new, developing communities. The fact that outsiders were aware of this differentiation and alienation, and treated it with hostility, added fuel to the process of community building.

The early Christian era was the first time in the Western tradition that religion and ethics became intertwined and inseparable. For the ancients, as I have mentioned previously, religion and ethics were separate. The early

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[4] 'Even in cases where an unbiased observer might find very small differences in fact, the perceptions of difference produce hostility and conflict.' Meeks, Op. Cit., p 179

Christians understood their religion and morality to be inseparable – and indeed superior - because their morality imitated the virtues of God.

> Since Christianity enjoins upon its believers the virtues of justice, self-control, frugality, and conjugal fidelity, its morality, Augustine insists, is far superior to that described and extolled in pagan writings about the gods. If men imitate these deities, they are rendered 'depraved' and 'unfit to be good members of society'[5]

However, as we have seen in the history to date, Greek and Roman virtue had not usually aimed at imitation of the gods, but at achievement of an ideal of *human* excellence.

There were additional reasons for the inseparability of Christian ethics and religion. God and Jesus had revealed the moral rules, and there was a unity between God, Jesus, charity and virtue. For instance, in various writings Augustine said that God was the perfect good and the source of all virtue, that Jesus Christ was a virtue and the source of virtues, and that charity was the essence of all virtues.[6] He also stated that virtue was 'a mental disposition consistent with nature and reason'[7] - which sounds very Stoic - however for Augustine, *reason* meant faith in the revelations of God and Jesus and *nature* meant behaviour in accordance with those same revelations. Furthermore, the ancient religion – unlike ancient philosophy and Christianity – had not been 'a way of life that included all of existence and all of inner life'.[8] Ancient religion had operated in a quite different sphere and had not competed with philosophy and ethics at all. By contrast, Christianity - for the first time in the Western tradition - offered a whole philosophy of life. The Christians would argue it was

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[5] Deane Herbert A., *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine*, (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1963), p 85
[6] Deane, Op. Cit., p83, Osborn Eric, *Ethical Patterns in Early Christian Thought*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp 136 and 175, and Portalie Eugene, *A Guide to the Thought of Saint Augustine*, Trans. Ralph J. Bastian, (London: Burns & Oates, 1960), pp 272-273
[7] *On 83 diverse questions*, 3.1.1, quoted in Osborn, Op. Cit., p 147

—the only true philosophy and it included all the informal mechanisms for social control and order that philosophies in previous eras had provided. This link between Christian virtue and social order was recognised at the time. For instance, Justin insisted that good (presumably Roman) rulers should welcome Christians.

> [M]ore than all other people we are your supporters and allies in maintaining public order. We believe, you see, that it is impossible for a wrong-doer or a greedy person or a conspirator - or a virtuous person - to hide from God, and everyone is headed for either eternal punishment or eternal salvation, depending on the merit of one's deeds.[9]

Of course, the differentiation between Christian ethics and the ethics of their contemporaries was not simply a case of fearing hell-fire and damnation. Meeks reports that the early Christian virtues were described in the language of Greek high culture[10]. They consisted in virtues that had been previously included in lists by Jews, Romans and Greeks.[11] Virtues were presented in the form of moral aphorisms, precepts and commands, discourses – on household management, friendship and so on - and letters, all of which were common to the Greeks and Romans.[12] Yet, Christian ethics were perceived by converts and outsiders alike as being so different as to result in aggression and discord.[13] It has been suggested that what was different was in fact the urgency with which the Christians adopted and practised their virtues.[14] We can also see that the availability of Christian virtue to people from every social stratum and ethnic background was a significant means of differentiating Christianity from the traditional elitism of Greek virtue and Roman virtue. Indeed, Augustine pointed out that 'Christianity

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[8] Hadot (2002), Op. Cit., p 272
[9] *Apology*, 12:1-2 quoted in Meeks, Op. Cit., pp 175-176
[10] Meeks, pp 30-31
[11] Meeks, pp 71-83
[12] Meeks, p 77
[13] Meeks, p 179
[14] Peter Brown, Op. Cit., p 260

has the same content as Platonism... but only Christianity has been able to make the masses adopt this way of life.'[15]

The early Christians propounded ethics that they and everyone else perceived as separating them from the larger society. This was arguably another manifestation of the social and political alienation experienced by the Hellenists and discussed in the previous chapter. However, the Christians also chose to see themselves as 'resident aliens' – inhabiting the Imperial state, but asserting loyalty to God and the Kingdom of Heaven.[16] Furthermore, examination of the surviving documents from the earliest times of Christianity shows that almost all of them: were concerned with the proper, moral behaviour of converts; were addressed to communities (not individuals); and were aimed at promoting the development of those communities.[17] In other words, for the early Christians the construction of morals and the construction of community were the same process.[18]

According to the early Christians, reason, wisdom, virtue and the virtues were not ideas to be analysed and defined – they were commands and promises made by God.[19] In addition, Jesus had given commands, such as 'love others as I have loved you' and 'follow me'. Thus the source and nature of wisdom, reasoning and values changed in this period - from humans thinking and developing ideas, definitions and concepts, finding moral wisdom within themselves and aspiring to a human ideal - to God revealing commands and values and humans being required to believe and obey. Whereas God and Jesus were understood to be perfectly wise, wisdom lost its place as the foremost human virtue when St. Paul claimed that:

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[15] Hadot (2002), pp 251-252
[16] Meeks, pp 30-31
[17] Meeks, p 5

> [N]othing of value exists without love... Knowledge is imperfect and will be superseded.... Love is the summing up of the law... Love is the realm of God's grace which is prior to the faith of the believer and makes that faith possible. Sacrificial love for others is the core of Christian behaviour...[20]

That ethics and wisdom were revealed by God and Jesus to their chosen people was another source of differentiation, solidarity and community cohesiveness. In addition, the divinity of moral laws was a source of a Hellenistic like tranquillity. Clement of Alexandria asserted that: '[t]he divine law must inspire fear, so that the philosopher may acquire and conserve peace of mind, thanks to prudence and attention to himself.'[21] Just as tranquillity was an entirely appropriate Stoic and Epicurean strategy for coping with the chaos, fearfulness, difficulties, and individual lack of political power in the Empire, so it was for the Christians. The early Christians were – by virtue of their minority social status - even more powerless and vulnerable than the Epicurean and Stoic Greeks and Romans.

The public elucidation and promotion of virtue

Education, self and public examination, and personal development – crucial to the acquisition of virtue in the past, but now involving some new techniques and adaptations of old ones - were central to the conversion process in particular and the ongoing practice of Christianity in general. At the same time, there was a notion of what we might call 'instant virtue', that was available through God's grace and the conversion and baptism rituals. The conversion process was understood to have a transformational effect on the individual's morality and this was not new either. The idea that a moral transformation was achieved through conversion had been common in Judaism for some time. For instance, Philo wrote about Jewish conversion that:

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[18] Ibid.
[19] Osborn, Op. Cit., p 22

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> The proselytes become at once temperate, continent, modest, gentle, kind, humane, serious, just, high-minded, truth-lovers, superior to the desire for money and pleasure, just as conversely the rebels from the holy laws are seen to be incontinent, shameless, unjust, frivolous, petty-minded, quarrelsome, friends of falsehood and perjury...[22]

This idea of transformation is interesting and raises many questions. Why were people seeking an instant transformation, which would have been inconceivable to their predecessors in Western civilisation and, for instance, their Stoic contemporaries? On the other hand, if they were not actively seeking it, why was virtue presented as such? Was the Hellenistic life of reflection perceived as too difficult, too unattainable, too time consuming, too elitist? The fact is that early Christian converts underwent rigorous selection, induction and educational processes prior to their formal acceptance into the Church. These processes aimed at weeding out people from inappropriate professions and backgrounds, and then providing comprehensive moral training for the successful candidates. Why the notion of a transformative ritual would be viewed as necessary in these circumstances seems unclear. However, it does seem clear that both of these processes – the lengthy educational one and the quick transformational one – were conducive to making people feel part of a special community, different and separate from others. The sense of community was further entrenched by the ambience of 'secret' meetings under the symbol of the fish.

These selection and conversion processes were all part of keeping the community pure and enabled St. Paul and others to exaggerate the moral differences between Christians and others. Conversion was intended to 'stigmatiz[e] "the world" being left and to distinguish the sacred space being

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[20] Osborn, Op. Cit., pp 34-35
[21] *Stromata*, II, 20, 120 quoted in Hadot (2002), Op. Cit., p 241
[22] *On the Virtues*, 181-82 quoted in Meeks, Op. Cit., p 30

entered.'[23] Likewise, the ritual of baptism – being washed clean of the rest of the world - was a powerful means of generating an individual sense of transformation and a sense of communal solidarity.

This sense of a separate moral community was, of course, not entirely new. The Epicureans were notable for forming 'intentional and highly structured communities, and it is in them that we find the closest social analogy, at least among the philosophical schools...'[24]. However, the Christian communities were of a scale – in terms of numbers of communities, not size of individual communities – and style that was new. The early Christians formed many tiny communities that depended on the private space and hospitality of a patron – the householder who provided a house where the community could meet. Being unable – because of their minority status and exposure to hostility and violence - to make use of public space and facilities, the Christian communities were, from the first, established on a structure of reciprocity and mutual trust.[25] The people offering their homes were providing patronage and the rest were obliged to respect and receive that patronage. These people were (almost exclusively) not of the class that traditionally held or owned patronage. They were distant from the decurial class (that normally could offer Roman patronage) but were imitating the conventional honour-dependence patron-client model.[26] However, there was some disagreement among Christians as to whether such traditional Greek/Roman social structures were to be respected. Should they be encouraged - as leading to civic harmony and avoidance of strife - or should they be avoided because 'unity of the church will be attained not by practice of civic virtues, but by isolation and

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[23] Meeks, Op. Cit., p 33
[24] Meeks, Op. Cit., p 26
[25] Meeks, Op. Cit., p 45
[26] Meeks, Op. Cit., p 46

purity'.[27] It appears this question was never resolved and was ultimately overtaken by the development of the institutional Church effectively making the question redundant.

The pro-society quality of virtue

The virtue of charity

The notion of charity was a principal means of integrating Christian religion and virtue, it defined the Christian notion of the human *telos*, and it was a prominent means of creating, maintaining and controlling communities. As a virtue, charity was the habit of loving well, of loving one's neighbour as oneself. It was also an act of religious piety – loving God – and through this love achieving what was understood in this period to be the *telos* of all humans – union with God. The *telos* of union with God was approached in a variety of ways – imitation of God's virtues, love of God, being the recipient of God's grace, and ultimately attaining Heaven following judgment by God. Thus, the *telos* of union with God was intricately bound up with methods of achieving virtue and the motivation for being virtuous. The early Christian understanding of charity was also a means of re-framing the question of what constituted the good of human life. Augustine said '[w]hen we ask how good a man is we do not ask what he believes or hopes but what he loves.' [28] This ignored the fact that until the advent of Christianity, the calculation of good in a person was never concerned with beliefs or hopes, but only how the person acted, particularly in respect of family and community. Presumably though, love would have similar consequences as virtuous acts toward family and community.

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[27] Meeks, Op. Cit., pp 46-47

[28] Augustine, *Enchiridon on Faith, Hope, and Charity*, 31.117; 32.121 quoted in Burt Donald X., *Friendship and Society: An Introduction to Augustine's Practical Philosophy*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), p 47

Charity can also be understood as a re-framing and combining of several ancient virtues and moral concepts. Love of one's neighbour bore a strong resemblance to various Greek virtues such as friendliness, justice and friendship. Love of God echoed the very ancient maxim 'Honour the gods' and the virtue of piety, especially as Socrates had envisaged it. Love of oneself could be seen as a reworking of care of the self, especially when we remember that care of the self implied care for others as well. Even love of enemies - while it must have seemed a strange notion to many Greeks and Romans - would have been comprehensible to Socrates for instance. The Christian bundling of these four values into the virtue of charity provided a powerful tool, not just for community building, but for social control, order and flourishing as well.

The virtue of faith

In this era, faith subsumed the old important intellectual virtue of wisdom and knowledge. Faith - unlike the intellectual virtues as described by Aristotle[29] - was a habit and it was a habitual way of thinking that counteracted reason, preceded reason and was reason itself.

> Faith is a knowledge of those things which cannot otherwise be understood. Except you believe you will not understand. Greeks look down on faith but without faith there can be no knowledge of higher things. Faith becomes knowledge, a knowledge which is a habit and can stand up against reason and argument.... Faith anticipates, faith is an act of will, faith understands in advance.[30]

Nevertheless, Clement used Aristotle's demonstration that 'all proof depends on an unprovable first premise' as an argument for faith being rational, necessary and not merely opinion.[31] Faith was, I would argue, the glue for Christianity. It enabled the intertwining of religion and ethics through the understanding that

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[29] For whom intellectual virtues such as wisdom and knowledge were learned through education rather than habituation. See Aristotle (1998b), Op. Cit., 1103a11-1103a15

[30] Osborn, Op. Cit., p 69

moral rules were revealed, thus making Christianity a whole way of life. It gave converts the sense of being different, of being chosen, and of being part of a special community. It was necessary to have faith in order to love God and be charitable, and thus was a means to the social control and flourishing that came with charity.

The virtue of humility

Death by crucifixion was designed to be the most shameful punishment possible. For the central figure in a religious movement to be revered and respected, this official and profound shaming needed to be transformed into a virtue. Christian humility consisted in despising the conventions, believing Jesus to be God, refusing to recant, and emulating, patterning or modelling oneself on Jesus.[32] Humility was shown by taking the lowest seat at a meal; wearing simple clothing; quietness and moderation; and it could only be practised within a community. One could not live alone and care for others or come last. To follow Jesus' pattern, one needed brothers with feet to wash. Imitation of a god was great hubris and arrogance according to the Greek way of thinking. However, the early Christians redefined humility and pride on the grounds that Jesus had come down from heaven to take the form of a man, conforming in humble obedience to God's will and then dying for others. Nonetheless, Christian humility did not mean avoiding self-praise. Augustine said:

> [T]here is nothing wrong in praising ourselves as long as we praise ourselves as the work of God, praising ourselves not because we are this or that kind of person but because we are God's creation, praising ourselves not because we have this or that gift but because God works through our gifts (whatever they are) to accomplish his purpose in the world...[33]

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[31] Osborn, Op. Cit., p 70
[32] Meeks, Op. Cit., pp 86-88
[33] Burt, Op. Cit., p 50

This perspective on humility also connected with the notion of being God's chosen ones. Humility and praising oneself for being created by God reinforced community spirit and increased the sense of alienation and difference from everyone else. Then there was the militant suffering component of humility, so admired by early Christians.

> The simplest virtues - sexual purity, a quiet life, regular attendance on the rituals of the group, obedience to leaders - become heroic in a world where the devil plots to destroy the faith and employs the very pillars of the dominant society in his ultimately futile attack upon the people of God.[34]

Being God's creation was a matter for self-praise and being humble was justification for thinking oneself heroic – and to feel heroic when one was part of a politically powerless social minority would have been attractive indeed.

The redefining of the boundaries, questions and language of virtue and ethics was most clearly visible in discussions on charity, faith and humility. These redefinitions enabled the early Christians to assert their moral difference and to perceive themselves as a new race of people - aliens living in a foreign world while they waited to be admitted to their own Kingdom in Heaven.

The virtue of almsgiving

The Christian virtue of almsgiving was a very different matter from the generosity of Aristotle's high-minded gentleman. For one thing, 'ordinary people with no great wealth but out of each week's income should, not just in one grand gesture, but little by little, systematically gather what money could be spared...'.[35] This money was not just for local needy people or local church expenses, but was sent great distances for people ('brothers' and 'saints') who would never be seen by the almsgivers. The practice of almsgiving is thought to have been closely

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[34] Meeks, Op. Cit., p 88
[35] Meeks, Op. Cit., p 107

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connected with – indeed a primary driver for - the institutionalisation of the Church[36]. I would note, however that this Christian virtue originated in Judaism where there was no parallel institutionalisation, nor was there in Buddhism which also had a strong tradition of almsgiving. So perhaps it was not the practice as such, but the type of people engaged in the practice and their particular objectives. Christian almsgiving created a major power base for bishops in large cities who had control and administration of the offerings, which could be withheld or passed on to the poor. Almsgiving also required significant co-ordination between churches and communities in widely spread locations. Unlike all the other Christian virtues, almsgiving was not commanded by God or Jesus and was viewed as voluntary – although in view of the habituation of church ritual, and the public nature of the offering, it was perhaps difficult to avoid volunteering. Furthermore, almsgiving was perceived as an imitation of Christ who 'though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.'[37] Christ's impoverishment was not to do with earthly wealth, but with giving up his heavenly riches to come down to the world in obedience to God. The funding and support of distant missions, the institutionalisation of the Church, to say nothing of the growing wealth of the Church, achieved through almsgiving, was crucial to the success of the early Christian movement and indeed, its long-term survival.

The monastic or ascetic virtues

The monastic or ascetic virtues of poverty and obedience, linked with mortification, humility, self-control and detachment from the world were described and propounded by Basil the Great around the mid to late Fourth

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[36] Meeks, Op. Cit., p 108
[37] 2 Corinthians 8:9

Century CE.[38] These virtues came with several worrying double standards. First, that there was an appearance of one morality for monks and another for the laity. This was not Basil's intention; rather there was to be one morality with two paths - a path of perfection and a lower way - with a parallel in the elite virtue of Plato's philosophers. Basil drew on this philosophical ideal, but at the same time saw it as a dilemma because he wanted one church and no mediocrity.[39] Second, while monastic poverty meant lack of ownership by the individual monk, it certainly did not necessitate a lack of wealth and material goods for the monastic community - goods that would then be enjoyed by the residents. Third, while monks might have viewed themselves as a community detached from worldly business, they still needed food, shelter, clothing and so on, and this required either some level of worldly effort on their part or reliance on worldly people outside the monastic community. Indeed, supporting a local monastery that espoused un-worldliness was often an important defining activity and responsibility for a 'worldly' community.

Basil wanted all Christians, not just monks, to practice asceticism, to renounce worldly possessions, relationships and behaviours. He saw asceticism as an alternative to martyrdom - the only two ways of renouncing all connections to present life and being ready for being with God.[40] Osborn remarks that '[h]owever much we may admire the spirit and heroism of Basil and the early ascetics, we should remember that their contribution was neither distinctly Christian nor ultimately harmless.'[41] Yet arguably, Basil's ascetic vision fundamentally shaped Christian morals. The ascetic virtue that was always

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[38] Osborn, Op. Cit., pp 97-98
[39] Osborn, Op. Cit., pp 110-111
[40] Osborn, Op. Cit., pp 92-94
[41] Osborn, Op. Cit., p 112

required of everyone was the virtue of obedience - which may in fact have been the most important virtue for the survival of the early Church and indeed its survival for the next twelve centuries or so. The virtue of obedience placed an inviolable prohibition on the questioning of any virtue, value, dogma or decision made in the name of God or the Church. Whereas an absence of charity would be difficult to prove and punish – no one could say what love existed in another's heart - an absence of obedience was clear and much more easily policed. Making a virtue of obedience ensured that the Church had control over everyone within what would eventually become an empire spanning most of the known world.

The virtue of self-control

Self-control or continence was another important Christian virtue. This is because self-control was the antidote to *lust*, for writers such as Augustine, a generic term for sin, not limited to sexual concerns but including lust for material goods (greed), lust for honour (pride) etc. Self-control was also concerned with language, money, eating and drinking, although Augustine's view was that self-control was a matter of controlling the heart not just the lips[42]. Nevertheless, the connection between self-control and sexual behaviour was extremely close. Clement for instance considered marriage to be a more ideal state than celibacy because it provided more opportunities for practising self-control and more trials to overcome.[43] Self-control, was a Christian means of informal social order and behavioural control – in the absence of a police force and complex legal and judicial systems – just as it always had been in the previous eras of the history of virtue.

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[42] Osborn, Op. Cit., p 163
[43] Osborn, Op. Cit., p 64

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The virtue of friendship

Friendship was a virtue in the early Christian catalogue, but it was a remarkably different concept from the friendship of the Stoics and Epicureans. Early Christians clearly thought of themselves as brothers, but they were exhorted by people such as Basil not to have individual, affectionate friendships or personal relationships. The personal reliance and reciprocity of Greek and Roman friendship was replaced by friendship as a sense of community, both among people within a local church and with people the Christian might never meet. Friendship was an important virtue for Augustine because of its potential to create the ideal sort of society he envisaged.

> In all their societies they would aim at creating the elements crucial for friendship: a knowledge that could be the basis for mutual understanding and trust, a concern for the good of the other, a unity of heart with each other and with God that would truly make their society to be 'one out of many'. Of course, the size of the society would be an obstacle to true friendship with everyone. But they would try to love others, if not as actual friends, at least in order that they might become friends. They would be so open to others that they would consider no one to be a stranger, realizing that all people are members of the one human family.[44]

In other words, this was a concept of friendship that did not require people to be friends or even know each other. Augustine had a dream of a 'truly ordered society' and he saw Christian friendship as the means to unity, order and concord between all strata of people.[45]

The virtue of hospitality

With both a symbolic and a practical function, the early Christian virtue of hospitality reminded individuals of their identity as God's people and made the travelling ministries of prophets and apostles feasible.[46] Hospitality was a Jewish and Middle Eastern traditional virtue and although it had disappeared from the

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[44] Burt, Op. Cit., p 146
[45] Burt, Op. Cit., p 149

Greek virtue catalogues since the Homeric era, it seems clear that it had remained as one of the basic social mores. However, the early Christians changed the definition of this virtue too. Withholding hospitality was recommended as a 'weapon in disputes over right belief and proper behaviour'.[47] Christians were exhorted not to provide hospitality to purveyors of other beliefs or to people who stayed more than one day (unless in need) or who asked for money.[48] The idea that a virtue should be withheld as a weapon or limited to a very short period of time seems questionable, but there we are.

The virtue of courage

Courage was only occasionally mentioned as a Christian virtue although clearly it was required of travelling apostles and preachers, as well as the martyrs. In the middle of the Second Century, Justin wrote in his *Apology* that

> Previously, while devoted to Plato's doctrines, he had heard the Christians slandered, but when he saw their fearlessness in the face of death and other threats, he recognized that the slanders must be false. For no 'pleasure lover or dissolute person or cannibal' ever showed such indifference to death.[49]

Courage had not been highlighted as a major virtue by the Hellenistic Schools though it had been necessary to be courageous if one was to commit to a (non-Imperial) philosophical way of life. The early Christians appeared consistent with their peers and immediate predecessors in this matter. We might argue that courage was redundant – as a virtue - if one had absolute faith in an omnipotent God or one felt more attached to the Kingdom of Heaven and the next life than to this place and earthly life. On the other hand, courage was implicit in the heroism and suffering of martyrs. The physical hardship of the monk's witness was also seen as courageous and heroic. Then there was the courage it took all early

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[46] Meeks, Op. Cit., p 105
[47] Meeks, Op. Cit., p 106
[48] Ibid., referring to 2 John 10 and the *Didache*

Christians to believe and bear witness to what were perceived as radically new ideas, while surrounded by a hostile prevailing culture. Interestingly, there is a suggestion that the faith of martyrs could not be questioned, because it would require too great a paradox to think that people who were so courageous could have wrong beliefs.[50]

The virtue of justice

Like their Hellenistic contemporaries and predecessors, the early Christians had a fairly practical and uncomplicated view of justice – it was a matter of equity and fair dealing. What early Christianity added to the concept of justice was a sense of benevolence, of wanting to do justice because of love for both friends and enemies.[51] Unsurprisingly, Augustine had very Socratic ideas about justice. A Christian 'does not return evil for evil, since to do so would be to make himself evil and unjust.' Justice had been commanded by God, but the early Christian also understood that 'nothing one's enemies can do can harm his soul' and one's soul was one's most precious possession.[52] We need to note however, that the early Christians had even less authority or power to influence justice in their world than the Stoics and Epicureans. They lived as a minority within the hostile Imperial society and for the most part could only experience justice as it was done to them. The notion of justice as a virtue that embodied benevolence to others, even enemies was therefore yet another feature of their moral differentiation from the people around them and their community building.

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[49] Meeks, Op. Cit., p 20
[50] Rousseau Philip, *The Early Christian Centuries*, (London, New York: Longman/Pearson Education, 2002), p 166
[51] Deane, Op. Cit., p 83
[52] Deane, Op. Cit., p 84

The significance of public recognition and motivation for virtue

Early Christians were motivated to be virtuous by a number of mostly public and community oriented practices. It was expected that conversion and baptism had been morally transforming. The socialisation or habituation that came from Christian sacraments and rituals, as well as the public admonitions, shunning and shaming practices that were part of Church attendance were also expected to motivate the individual to be virtuous. Then there was the motivation of God's policing of behaviour and the consequent rewards and punishments after death – which if not a public process as such, was a publicly shared belief.

Conversion and baptism rituals were certainly influential experiences for 'taking off' vices - like taking off clothes - and leaving one free to be virtuous.[53] The ritual of the Eucharist was an opportunity for admonishing or shunning people whose behaviour was not acceptable. For instance, it was expected that people would not profane the sacraments or expose the community to discord, by not patching up quarrels beforehand.[54] In addition to a therapeutic outcome, moral exhortations and overt, public, external shaming provided a quite new motivation for being virtuous. In previous eras, morality had been largely self-motivated. Learning and practising virtue was a personal choice – that had benefits for the individual and the community - and involved a close relationship between a teacher and student within the educational setting, such as a philosophical school. In this period, all sorts of people (not just teachers or parents or people in authority) were telling one another what to do and teaching each other. Shame had dwindled as a motivation for virtue in the previous three historical eras, but now the early Christians revived shame as an important

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[53] Meeks, Op. Cit., p 94

motivation and redefined it as an external and public process. Other rituals: singing hymns and psalms, prayer at particular times throughout the day and waking up at midnight to pray, fasting (as an expression of humility) and other forms of self-denial were all intended to reinforce the moral code.[55] They also reinforced the sense of belonging to a special and separate community.

Arguably, the primary motivating factor was that Christians believed virtue would be rewarded and sin punished after death. Seneca's rejection of judgment after death as 'mere tales' and a threat to equanimity, together with similar responses from other Stoics and Epicurus, suggest these were widely held popular beliefs. They were certainly held by some of the late Jewish groups. The Christians believed that no one could hide from the judgment of God and that there was no other possibility than eternal damnation and punishment for the sinful and eternal salvation for the virtuous.[56] There was also a sense of being virtuous (or at least not committing sin) in daily behaviour that expressed loyalty to God the King.[57] Notions of a final judgment dependent on virtue were widely promoted from the earliest Christian times.[58]

Honour continued to be mentioned, but like Hellenistic attitudes toward honour, it was not necessarily associated with virtue. For example, Paul stated that honour should be given to whom it is due[59] and along the same lines: 'Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the Emperor'[60]. Meeks explains this conformity as a case of early Christians wanting – like any immigrant group – to be seen as quiet living, undemanding people, causing no

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[54] Meeks, Op. Cit., pp 96-97
[55] Meeks, Op. Cit., p 99
[56] Meeks, Op. Cit., pp 165-166
[57] Meeks, Op. Cit., p 168
[58] Meeks, Op. Cit., p 175
[59] Romans 13:7

-trouble and behaving appropriately toward the non-Christians that surrounded them.[61]

This is the challenge in understanding the survival and success of the early Christians. On the one hand, asserting a moral difference was central to their survival, on the other, these same moral values involved much conformity with prevailing views and behaviours and 'almost no innovation'[62]. Unique in the history of Western virtues, this era saw a concept of virtue and particular virtues that were precisely the means of creating communities and differentiating them from the wider society. These moral values provided a sense of identity as a new, alien race. It was Christian virtue(s) that attracted converts and funding, enabling the growth and survival of small communities, the institutional Church and ultimately an empire.

There was a very long chronological gap between this early Christian era and the next, but early Christian ideas about virtue and the virtues provided both the foundation and the problems for ethical thinking in the Middle Ages. We will see that some of the serious social problems of the intervening dark ages will be dealt with by medieval virtues. Also of interest is that some of the ancient ideas ignored or rejected by the early Christians and indeed some that were ignored by the Hellenists, will be revived, adopted and adapted by the medieval Christians.

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[60] 1 Peter 2:17
[61] Meeks, Op. Cit., p 49
[62] Peter Brown, Op. Cit., p 260

7

VIRTUE – THE MEDIEVAL WAY OF LIFE

Starting with the Bible, moral instruction floods all life.
KARL VOSSLER[1]

Despite widespread superstition, social and religious strife and deep anxiety about sin, the people of the Middle Ages valued a rich abundance of virtues. Indeed, virtue was once again the antidote to fear, but whereas the Hellenistic era had adopted a fairly single-minded, wisdom plus endurance approach to dealing with fear, in this era fear was managed and counterbalanced by a multiplicity of virtues. In the medieval world almost everything a person did, felt or thought was either a virtue or a sin – life was flooded with morality. Work was undertaken for its virtuous properties. Even the game of chess was 'moralised' by Dominican Jacobo de Cessole's humbling of the role of the king.[2] Almost all the virtues of the past reappeared in the medieval catalogues and dozens of new virtues were added.

There is a considerable gap in the moral philosophy literature between the previous era and this one, which spanned the Twelfth to the Fourteenth Centuries CE. Nevertheless, we will find that the medieval understanding of virtue can be confidently traced to the past. Early Christian ideas persisted or were deliberately re-worked to resolve inconsistencies and errors of logic. The school syllabus used classical Latin texts (such as Cicero) to teach both grammar and virtue.[3] There

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[1] Vossler Karl, *Mediaeval Culture: An Introduction to Dante and his Times, Volume 1*, (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1958), p 254
[2] Le Goff Jacques, *Medieval Civilization 400-1500*, Julia Barron Trans., Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1989), p 361
[3] Luscombe D. E., 'Peter Abelard and Twelfth-Century Ethics' in *Peter Abelard's Ethics* Ed. D.E. Luscombe, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p xviii-xix

was a fashion for collecting classical tags and proverbs chosen for their ethical content.[4] Furthermore, philosopher theologians such as Peter Abelard and St. Thomas Aquinas incorporated Greek - especially Aristotelian – ideas into the Christian ethical framework.   Glimpses of light on the problems and circumstances of life in the intervening Dark Ages also offer explanations for some of the emphases in medieval virtue.

Not surprisingly, given the history of the virtues and their relationship with community to this point, we will see that the nature of that relationship continued to adapt and evolve in the Middle Ages. The general strategy for this period was not to find unity in the virtues and a single-minded approach to dealing with difficulties, but instead to promote a profusion of virtues that each attended to different sorts of problems. There continued to be variations in the moral vision held by Christians, but at the same time there was universal acceptance of a core group of virtues, especially charity, chastity, wisdom obedience and sobriety. Moral education was universal and was delivered primarily via ubiquitous religious instruction – from sermons, architecture, art, morality plays and so on. The virtues of this period were generally aimed at maintaining the *status quo*, at coping, at controlling the populace – both as individuals and as communities - and where possible, controlling the social environment or if that was not possible controlling human responses to social and environmental problems.   Indeed, virtues were often fairly direct solutions or antidotes to the vast array of cultural, social and political problems. The scope of the relationship between virtue and society had two layers in this period.   One layer was the local relationship of virtue, honour and flourishing of the individual and the small community he or

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[4] Luscombe, Op. Cit., p xix

she lived in. The other layer was the global relationship between the individual or community and the whole Christian world. The failure of some people within a community to practice the Christian virtue of unquestioning obedience could have horrendous consequences for the entire community. As for instance, the Albigensians discovered to their cost when they were all massacred because the Pope's general could not identify which were the heretics among them. Virtue and the human *telos* continued to be linked; though the link was not quite as clear-cut and direct as it had been in earlier eras. Motivation for virtue came primarily from widespread fear - of things that could happen to individuals and their communities in life - as well as fear of eternal damnation. Private practices of repentance and confession were increasingly important, but so were the older practices of public confession, penance and flagellation.

The association between the style of virtue and the stability of society

The theologian philosophers from Peter Abelard onward were fairly united in viewing virtue as essentially a habit – a habit of the 'well-constituted' mind or the will.[5] Abelard was credited with bringing this (and other) ancient Greek themes into Christian theology. St. Thomas Aquinas revived further Aristotelian details to the definition of virtue as habit of mind; asserting that the habit of virtue must be intentional, voluntary and orderly. It was not enough to do virtuous things automatically or occasionally, as a mere physical response or because they felt good, the habit must entail consistently, freely and intentionally using one's will and reason.[6] Like Augustine, Aquinas liked order in all things (his books are masterpieces of order) and the habit of virtue was understood to bring order or

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[5] Abelard, Op. Cit., p 129

regulation to a person's life, and this habit used order or reason to choose   ――

virtuously.[7]

Virtuous habit, together with the personal and communal order it brought

was possibly the only remedy for a society that was wracked with disharmony,

insecurity, fear and violence. There were so many things to fear. The wars and

calamities of the previous few centuries might return. The tentative new security

and 'sweets of plenty' might be lost.[8]   The things that did happen: strikes,

insurrections, economic depression, bad weather and poor harvests, increasing

prices, famine and Bubonic plague were significant crises.[9] Top these off with the

Hundred Years War that occurred intermittently from 1337 onward and we are

talking about catastrophe. Through this noise and violence, we hear some quiet,

calm, generally quite methodical voices, like those of Aquinas and Christine de

Pisan who used authorities from the past to illustrate and justify their moral

visions in a time when '[n]othing that could be proposed was certain, except what

had been vouchsafed for in the past.'[10] To choose the habit of virtue and with it

the hope of Heaven, to try to create some sort of order in such a disorderly world

was surely the only possible way to live. However, this was not a Hellenistic sort

of endurance through indifference and rigorous mastery of passions and desires.

Like many ancient writers (and unlike the early Christians) William of

Ockham was anxious about the role of passions in morality, seeing them as

something debilitating and necessary to overcome. Not so Aquinas, whose

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[6] Aquinas St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica, Volume XXIII Virtue*, Trans. W. D. Hughes, (London and New York: Blackfriars, in conjunction with Eyre & Spottiswoode and McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1969), p5

[7] Copleston F. C., *Aquinas*, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1977), pp 205, 207

[8] Ralph Glaber quoted in Le Goff, Op. Cit., p57

[9] Le Goff, Op. Cit., pp 106-108

[10] Le Goff, Op. Cit., p 325

approach was integrative[11] asserting that passions were as necessary as reason, were good when they were controlled by reason, and reason needed to be attuned to sensitivity.

> [But] when [passions] are allowed to obscure reason and to lead us into acts, not necessarily external acts, which are contrary to right reason, they are bad. But it is false to say that man would be better off without any passions or emotions; for without them man would not be man. We have no right to say that all passions are evil.[12]

Aquinas' ideas on the passions were perhaps the beginnings of a very slow shift in perspective that will culminate with the Humean view of virtue as being essentially passion – more on this development in the coming chapters. Meanwhile, medieval people were passionate about many things – food and feasting, colour and stained glass windows, beauty and brightly painted sculpture, jewel encrusted bookbinding. However, 'behind this coloured phantasmagoria lay the fear of darkness and the quest for light which was salvation'.[13] These medieval passions were consistent with the prevailing concept of virtue and the need to keep fear at bay.

An important project for the medieval theologian philosophers was to systematise morality (or re-systematise it) and to eliminate inconsistencies and contradictions in the early Christian ideas. Whereas the early Christians were happy to say that virtue was love and love was virtue, that Jesus was virtue and God was the source of virtue, Aquinas explained that:

> Augustine's saying is to be understood of virtue in its unqualified sense; not that every virtue is simply love, but that it depends in some way on love, inasmuch as it depends on the will, the primordial motion of which is love...[14]

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[11] Steel Carlos, 'Rational by Participation: Aquinas and Ockham on the Subject of the Moral Virtues', in *Franciscan Studies*, 1998; 56: 359-82, p 379
[12] Copleston, Op. Cit., p 213
[13] Le Goff, Op. Cit., p 335
[14] Aquinas (1969), Op. Cit., p 27

In line with this systematisation, Aquinas was keen to revive Aristotle's notion that the moral virtues were means between excessive and deficient behaviours. Some commentators see Aquinas as creating a problem with this, because the theological virtues clearly did not fit the model - there was no such vice as being too faithful or too charitable. However, Aristotle had viewed the mean as the essence of moral virtues, he did not apply it to his intellectual virtues – one could not suffer from too much understanding – so I would argue that it was quite consistent for Aquinas to similarly restrict the mean to the moral virtues. Again, we cannot help but see this systematisation as a response to the chaos of the medieval world. Moreover, the introduction of the Aristotelian mean in this time of great excesses and deficiencies appears extraordinarily apt, as well - we might imagine - as being readily understandable to Aquinas' listeners.

The absence of any overarching unity in the virtues of this period suggests that in the cultural, social and political circumstances of the Middle Ages, unity of the virtues – by contrast with the unity provided by charity in the early Christian era - was either an impossible or an irrelevant notion. During this period the anxiety and physical deprivations arising from wars and crusades, violence and corruption, social upheavals, class struggles, Church schisms and rampant diseases appear to have been managed, coped with, contained, by classing almost every action and thought as a virtue or a sin. It is almost as if the abundance - of virtues, of ideas about virtues (relative to the previous era), of moral language - was an antidote to the scarcity of comfort and safety people were experiencing. Certainly moral instruction, moral formation of the individual and the self- and public examination of moral character and conduct were pervasive and every occasion involved virtue. For instance, even work was idealised in the Middle Ages. People did not work for their own economic gain or for collective

economic progress. Rather, they worked to avoid idleness – a dangerous opening for the Devil – or for penance, or to mortify the body. The economic aims of working were limited to personal subsistence and support of the un-propertied poor.[15]

The public elucidation and promotion of virtue

For all that philosophers - and writers such as de Pisan - were interested in the theoretical nature of virtue, the explanation and promotion of particular virtues formed the bulk of their ethical works. Hadot explains that as in antiquity, philosophy in the Middle Ages 'did not designate a theory or a way of knowing; rather it signified a lived wisdom, and a way of living in accordance with reason'.[16] Reason, the *logos*, of course meant the word of God. Medieval thinkers, like the early Christians before them, were focused on an orderly way of life that imitated the rational virtues of God and Jesus.

During the centuries between the early Christians and the Middle Ages, it had become the norm that only a small number of people in the community – monks, clergy, princes – were expected to practice their religion fully.[17] Such people were also expected to be virtuous on behalf of the whole community.[18] However, 'a new idea was taking hold among scholars meditating upon Holy Scripture, the explosive idea that salvation was not acquired by passive sheeplike participation in religious rites but was "earned" by an effort of self-

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[15] Le Goff, Op. Cit., p 222

[16] Dom Jean Leclercq quoted in Hadot (2002), Op. Cit., pp 240-241

[17] Duby Georges and Braunstein Philippe, 'The emergence of the Individual' in *A History of Private Life, Volume 2, Revelations of the Medieval World*, Georges Duby Ed., Arthur Goldhammer Trans., (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1988), p 528

[18] The rest were expected to quietly and respectfully observe the church services and sacraments, without actually understanding the Latin that that was used. Ibid.

transformation'.[19] We can view this as a new idea in the sense that it was a very long time since personal participation and virtuous transformation had been a universal practice, as it was for the early Christians. It was also only now in the Middle Ages that the concept of earning came about. Earning money[20], earning friendship[21], earning virtue – these were all new concepts and part of a new trend that had begun to place importance on the initiative, wealth and thus also the value of the individual.[22] For virtue and religion these new ideas manifested in the introduction of private confession – a promotion of virtue that was common to all the community, but emphasised private and inner life rather than public life. However, at this point in the history of virtue, such private, individual coaching was not the principal means of promulgating virtue.

Instruction in virtue took the form of relentlessly repeated stereotypical anecdotes - moral tales, monotonously repeated and repeated - that were taught and preached by moralists and clerics.[23] Everywhere there were lessons in virtue – sculptures of personified virtues were in the doorways of cathedrals; bibles, psalters and herbals were filled with illustrations of virtue; even flowers, stones and animals all had symbolic meanings that were moralistic.[24] Just as formal education, which was based on grammar until the end of the Twelfth Century, led to, was superimposed by and then was topped off with ethics.[25]

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[19] Duby and Braunstein, Op. Cit., p 513
[20] Duby Georges, 'Introduction: Private Power, Public Power' in *A History of Private Life, Volume 2, Revelations of the Medieval World*, Georges Duby Ed., Arthur Goldhammer Trans., (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1988), p xii
[21] Duby Georges, Barthélemy Dominique and Roncière Charles de La, 'Portraits' in *A History of Private Life, Volume 2, Revelations of the Medieval World*, Georges Duby Ed., Arthur Goldhammer Trans., (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1988), p 70
[22] Duby and Braunstein, Op. Cit., p 512
[23] Le Goff, Op. Cit., p 327
[24] Le Goff, Op. Cit., pp 352-353 and p 332
[25] Le Goff, Op. Cit., p 331

The pro-society quality of virtue

Many changes had occurred to the virtue catalogue since the early Christian era. For instance, some of the virtues that had previously been moral virtues became subordinated to theological virtues - such as friendship to charity. Piety, which had disappeared in the last catalogue, reappeared with a new definition. Hospitality, which had appeared – after an absence – in the early Christian list, disappeared again. Constancy, a Homeric virtue for women, reappeared as a virtue for everyone. All but two of Aristotle's list were re-incorporated. Good humour was probably vital to coping with the fraught and gloomy medieval life, but it was not mentioned as a virtue *per se*. Ambition of any kind was now a vice. Many of the qualities Aristotle used to describe his virtues became virtues in themselves, such as perseverance, equity and respect. Wisdom or prudence, subsumed into faith by the early Christians had now been revived as important virtues. The following discussion will focus on six widely promoted and important medieval virtues – charity, chastity, obedience, wisdom and prudence, and sobriety.

The virtue of charity

In the Middle Ages, the virtue of charity was understood as the love or friendship between an individual and God. It was also held that by loving God and as a result of loving God, individuals would also love their neighbours and enemies. Charity was also described in very practical terms.

> [The charitable woman] would render service to everyone for the sake of God. She goes around to the hospitals, visits the sick and the poor, according to her ability, helps them at her own expense and physical effort for the love of God. She has such great pity for people she sees in sin or misery that she weeps for them as though their distress were her own. She loves her neighbour's welfare as much as her own, is always striving to do good, is never idle; her heart burns

— ceaselessly with the desire to do works of mercy... Such a woman bears all injuries and tribulations patiently for the love of God.[26]

Charity was needed to help individuals cope with the desperate difficulties of life in the Middle Ages and perhaps to gain a sense of making a difference, doing something to counteract the crises and calamities of the times. It also provided something of a safety net (not necessarily an effective one, but all there was) for the sick and poor of a community.

Charity was something like friendship[27] - direct friendship toward a person known and loved, indirect friendship with those who were not known personally but were connected with a friend, and friendship with strangers - even those who were hurtful or enemies.[28] Charity was not just friendship, but included agreeableness and good manners toward others, qualities that were associated with justice and fairness, and which were necessary for social survival.

> [B]ecause man by nature is a social being, in common decency he owes plain truth to others, since without this human society could not survive. But even as man cannot live together without truthfulness, neither can they without agreeableness...[29]

These were not mere platitudes. Violence, aggression, killing, maiming and torture were commonplace medieval occurrences.[30] Much of the ferocity arose through the practice of vengeance, which was associated with manliness, virility and family honour. Failure to exact vengeance was shameful in the extreme and some series of private vendettas can be traced from the Sixth through to the

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[26] Pisan Christine de, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies or the Book of the Three Virtues*, Sarah Lawson Trans., (London: Penguin Books, 1987), p 44
[27] Aquinas St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica, Volume XXXIV Charity*, Trans. R. J. Batten, (London and New York: Blackfriars, in conjunction with Eyre & Spottiswoode and McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1975), p 7
[28] Aquinas (1975), Op. Cit., p 9
[29] Aquinas St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica, Volume XLI Virtues of Justice in the Human Community*, Trans. T.C. O'Brien, (London and New York: Blackfriars, in conjunction with Eyre & Spottiswoode and McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1972), p 203
[30] Rouche Michel, 'The Early Middle Ages in the West', in *A History of Private Life, Volume 1, From Pagan Rome to Byzantium*, Paul Veyne Ed., Arthur Goldhammer Trans., (Cambridge,

Eleventh Centuries.[31] We can see then than the promotion of charity, friendship and agreeableness was aimed at counteracting the disorderly social relations, violent behaviour and widely held values of the immediate past. Which is not to say that vengeance was not a virtue – it was still included, for instance, in Aquinas' catalogue - merely that these virtues offered a chance to thwart some of the violence.

The virtue of chastity

In a characteristically charming blend of religion and pragmatism (though she may have intended some irony) de Pisan described the virtue of chastity as follows.

> Chastity has the property of rendering the person who has it agreeable before God; without it a person would not be able to please Him and he would perish, according to what St Ambrose asserts when he says that chastity turns a human being into an angel. And besides its being so highly regarded by God, experience shows us that it is likewise highly praised in the world, for there is no one so full of faults that if it is generally known that she is chaste people will not respect her, but if she has the opposite reputation, regardless of her good deeds she cannot avoid being mocked behind her back and respected less.[32]

Chastity was a means of loving God, of maintaining innocence, of constraining lust, exercising judgment and ensuring that one was well respected in the community.[33]

There were many possible reasons why chastity would be so important to social flourishing in the Middle Ages. The ownership and inheritance of property was always an important matter and could not be safely managed without an insistence on chastity, as least for women. The rigid control of the Church

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Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), p 498

[31] Rouche, Op. Cit., p 499

[32] De Pisan, Op. Cit., pp 174-175

[33] Aquinas St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica, Volume XLIII Temperance,* Trans. Thomas Gilby, (London and New York: Blackfriars, in conjunction with Eyre & Spottiswoode and McGraw-Hill

infiltrated many aspects of the individual's life – not just sexual behaviour, but dress and food mores as well. Chastity, since the strong early influence of the Christian ascetics, had been viewed as a Christ-like excellence and the movement to make clerical celibacy mandatory (until now some Catholic clerics could marry) was a significant issue in this era. On a more pragmatic note, the promotion of chastity and virginity in the Twelfth Century – the so-called anti-matrimony century – could well have been a remedy for the significant population growth of the time.[34]

The virtue of obedience

Consistent with the early Christian view, obedience was particularly important for men and women living in medieval monastic communities, but was also a requirement of all the laity. Obedience was a hierarchical matter – first obey God's commandments, then obey the laws of society, finally obey the sovereign.[35] Disobedience was associated with the Devil (who had disobeyed God)[36] and with justice and fair behaviour toward superiors - necessary because 'to obey superiors is something required of us in keeping with the order that God has established.'

Obedience was aimed at orderly, hierarchical social control, both religious and secular, though the priority of obedience to God was always unmistakable. Obedience had been vital to the survival of communities in the early Christian era and I would argue that this continued or even increased in the Middle Ages. Schisms and heretical movements throughout much of this period seriously threatened the authority of the Church and its control over society. These threats were often triggered by outrage at the corruption within the Church. Christianity

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Book Company, 1968), p 159 and Bingen St. Hildegard of, *Scivias*, Trans. Mother Columba Hart and Jane Bishop, (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), p 446
[34] Le Goff, Op. Cit., p 334

had largely replaced paganism by the Middle Ages, but conversions and re-conversions were continuing.[37]   The Crusades of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries provided opportunities not only for the acquisition of great wealth, but for creating a new Christian ideal – a social and religious 'unity of thought and deed'.[38] The Crusades were also a potential means to recovering respectability following the scandal of battles between Christians in earlier times. Crusades – such as the Albigensian Crusade – were intended to enforce obedience and to provide an ideal that associated the cross with triumph rather than suffering.[39] The establishment of the Inquisition in the Thirteenth Century was also a manifestation of the urgent need for obedience and control. A flood of heresies since the mid Twelfth Century had been largely triggered by 'the moral laxity and corruption of the clergy – who's behaviour did not serve as an adequate model for a laity in search of moral and spiritual guidance at such a tumultuous time of change'.[40] The establishment of the Inquisition was intended to quash these heresies and bring about a return to obedience and Church control.

Also significant was the shift from the old hagiography emphasising solitary 'spiritual combat in the wilderness' to new stories of saints who exemplified the virtue of obedience. This shift had occurred in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries and reflected 'an increasingly dim view of the completely solitary life, for it allowed a man too much freedom'.[41]

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[35] De Pisan, Op. Cit., p 139
[36] Bingen, Op. Cit., p 427
[37] Le Goff, Op. Cit., pp 62-63
[38] Le Goff, Op. Cit., p 69
[39] Le Goff, Op. Cit., pp 69-70
[40] Burman Edward, *The Inquisition: The Hammer of Heresy*, (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2004), p 16
[41] Patlagean Evelyne, 'Byzantium in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries' in *A History of Private Life, Volume 1, From Pagan Rome to Byzantium*, Paul Veyne Ed., Arthur Goldhammer Trans., (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), p 631

Wisdom, as intelligence and knowledge, and as understanding and judgment was revived as a virtue in the Middle Ages. Wisdom began with the love and fear of God – 'When a person wisely worships his God, his wisdom is the origin of good works.'[42] Wisdom led to understanding and provided a role model for others.[43] Intellectual or scientific wisdom was a matter of contemplating causes, judging and ordering, using principles to arrive at conclusions and being a good judge of principles and precepts.[44] Wisdom was also construed in very practical terms, such as that wise people avoided debt and lived within their means.[45]

Prudence or practical wisdom meant acting well, by making sound choices and controlling passions and impulses.[46] It required understanding, the ability to learn from the past, comparing the past with the present and foreseeing problems that might arise in the future.[47] Prudence involved doing and making, not just thinking, but it was necessary that actions be undertaken with the right intentions.[48]

Some writers considered prudence and sobriety to be inseparable. Prudence was 'to love honour and a good reputation... good manners and behaviour...'[49]. Prudence required sobriety 'which does not extend only to eating and drinking, but to all other areas [in] which it can help to restrain excess.'[50] Sobriety also led to being easy to serve, contentment and modesty. Sleeping too

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[42] Bingen, Op. Cit., p 438·
[43] Ibid.
[44] Aquinas (1969), Op. Cit., p 45
[45] De Pisan, Op. Cit., p 130
[46] Aquinas (1969), Op. Cit., p 55
[47] Aquinas St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica, Volume XXXVI Prudence*, Trans. Thomas Gilby, (London and New York: Blackfriars, in conjunction with Eyre & Spottiswoode and McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1974a), p 5
[48] Aquinas (1974a), Op. Cit., pp 7 and 19
[49] De Pisan, Op. Cit., p 55
[50] Ibid.

much was not prudent because 'too much repose engenders sin and vice'.[51]

Sobriety and prudence also resulted in good sense in deeds and clothing, appropriate levels of enthusiasm, controlled speech and calm, composed sensible eloquence.[52]

Prudence was also connected to honesty, kindness, graciousness, making reasonable commands, and choosing 'people of good and upright lives who are devoted to God' for friends.[53]

The revival of wisdom and prudence as virtues in the Middle Ages was inevitable. The need to substitute faith for wisdom, to differentiate from the Hellenized world that valued wisdom above all other excellences and to denigrate all pagan thinking (even when it had been synthesised into early Christian thinking) had passed. This is not to say that faith and insistence on Church dogma were not still hugely important, but room had now been made for wisdom and faith to coexist. The need for differentiation through denigration of wisdom and prudence had passed because Christianity was now the prevailing culture. Furthermore, the tentative beginnings of scientific thinking and the rise of universities meant that individual intellectual knowledge and wisdom had come to be valued. As for practical wisdom, prudence, sound judgment and understanding, these were now as necessary to social flourishing as they had been in the *polis* and the Roman Empire. Wisdom and knowledge were needed to manage and co-ordinate the vast Church network, to feed, arm and transport crusaders, to construct the gloriously elaborate and durable architecture of these times, and so on. Medieval communities also needed prudence – especially the

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[51] De Pisan, Op. Cit., p 56
[52] De Pisan, Op. Cit., p 57
[53] De Pisan, Op. Cit., p 58

solemn sort of understanding and the curtailing of passionate impulses that seem to have been the preferred response to the calamities and tribulations of these times. To have keen insight and foresight would be highly desirable characteristics in preparing for and coping with wars, pestilence and all the other day to day difficulties of medieval life.

The virtue of sobriety

Sobriety seems to be an entirely appropriate virtue for the gloomy Middle Ages. Sobriety was not merely a matter of avoiding drunkenness (though it certainly was that too) – it was 'the companion of peace and Friendship and the enemy of all vice'.[54] The emphasis on sobriety and moderation in eating as well were very likely a rigorous response to the gluttony and drunkenness that had been rife during the preceding centuries. Meals – even everyday meals not just special occasions – had been 'veritable religious rituals' in the past.[55] Drunkenness had been regarded as a form of ecstasy - a gift from the gods – alcohol was the only readily available tonic, and gluttony, drunkenness and overindulgence were available to 'nearly everyone in Merovingian and Carolingian society'.[56] The gluttony was largely due to extremely poor diet – people were eating vast quantities of food and remaining severely malnourished.[57] The medieval emphasis on sobriety can be seem as a direct and necessary counterbalance 'intended as a criticism of the cult of the stomach'[58] as well as being a means of social order and control in the tradition of the ancient Greek virtue of self-control.

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[54] De Pisan, Op. Cit., p 140
[55] Rouche, Op. Cit., p 445
[56] Ibid.
[57] Rouche, Op. Cit., p 446
[58]. Rouche, Op. Cit., p 445

Unfortunately, there were just too many medieval virtues to be discussed in detail — within the space limitations of this thesis - however, their relevance to communal and individual survival and flourishing can be readily summarised. The virtues of love of God and of Heaven, faith and hope all provided a permanent and safe focus for contemplation and affection, trust and inspiration, when nothing seemed permanently safe in the medieval world. Mercy toward others was a preventative measure against a world where calamity struck regularly and unmercifully, and an adjunct to justice in a world where justice systems were unreliable and thin on the ground. Sanctity, religion and piety were the everyday expression and form of medieval life — personal and communal - so dominated by Church rituals and rules. Courage, perseverance, patience and constancy were necessary responses to the numerous large and small upheavals and tribulations faced by medieval individuals and communities. Martyrdom had to be a virtue given the central importance of stories about martyrs and saints that were used to illustrate and teach Church precepts and virtues. Magnanimity and magnificence were necessary to explain and justify the wealth and excess of the Church and secular elite in a world where the majority had no choice but to live in poverty and misery. Temperance, virginity, abstinence, fasting, discipline and modesty each played a part in social control and orderliness — at least an attempted control by Church, community and individuals over circumstances that often must have seemed quite out of control. Justice, equity, various modes of respect and gratitude were also mechanisms for coping with that out of control world, while vengeance — still a virtue for many including Aquinas[59] - was the only way of retaliating against the unfairness in that world. Liberality, almsgiving and peace keeping were attempts to solve or at least manage the social problems of poverty,

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[59] Aquinas (1972), Op. Cit., pp 117-121

sickness and violence. Finally, victory[60] was a hopeful virtue in a world where the individual or community rarely experienced a sense of triumph.

The significance of public recognition and motivation for virtue

Given the social and political conditions of the time, I wonder whether any motivating factors beyond fear - and there was a lot to be afraid of - were necessary to encourage virtue in this period. 'The middle ages was the realm par excellence of the great collective fears, and of the great collective, public and physical penances.'[61] Mass public confessions, mutual flagellation, hallucinated processions, dreams and visions of the Devil, angels, saints and God – these were partly due to malnourishment and disease, but they also offered hope.[62]

Ockham discussed being motivated for 'the sake of some useful or pleasurable good to be pursued' but dismissed this as not being a moral motivation.[63] Instead, he asserted that:

> [A]ctions performed for the sake of God are instances of perfect virtue, whereas actions performed because they are dictated by reason are instances of true virtue, though imperfect with respect to actions performed for the sake of God.[64]

However, could we expect that ordinary medieval people were motivated by the prospect of being perfect or practising their reason? In a world where people were bombarded daily by hunger, sickness, war, strife, death of loved ones or blame from the neighbour for the death of his cow, virtue was surely motivated by a desire for control – desire for personal and communal control over something, anything.

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[60] Victory was one of the virtues St. Hildegard of Bingen described from her God-sent visions. See Bingen, Op. Cit., p 350
[61] Le Goff, Op. Cit., p 241
[62] Ibid.
[63] King Peter, 'Ockham's Ethical Theory' in *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, Ed. Paul Vincent Spade, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p 235
[64] Ibid.

Abelard and Aquinas viewed repentance and shame respectively as motivations to virtue. Abelard saw repentance as 'sorrow of the mind' caused by doing wrong, but also connected it with fear of damnation.[65] Following Aristotle, Aquinas said that shame was not a virtue in itself, but it was good and praiseworthy to be sensitive to shame.[66] It was an emotion rather than a habit;[67] it was a part of temperance and fostered 'a sense of honour by banishing what is offensive, without, however, itself attaining the perfection of being honourable.'[68]

Notably, honour returned as a motivation in this period. Honour was of course motivating the medieval courtly virtues, but after centuries of religious antagonism toward pagan ideas, Aquinas gave it Christian respectability.

> [H]onour is due to excellence... and a man's excellence is gauged by his virtue above all... Properly speaking, therefore, being honourable amounts to the same as being virtuous. Virtues are desirable for their own sake, it is in this sense that Cicero speaks of virtue, truth, and knowledge attracting us by their force and beauty. This is enough to make them honourable. Some of the objects which are honoured beside virtue are better than virtue, thus God himself and beatitude, yet we know less about them by experience than we do about the everyday virtues. Hence they lay a greater claim to the name of honest worth.[69]

This is a fascinating passage. Association between virtue and honour had been largely denied in the early Christian period, possibly due to the Roman association between honour and political appointments – which had very little if anything to do with virtue as such. This had also been consistent with the later Greek ages when 'love of honour was not considered a merit... it came to correspond to ambition, as we know it.[70] Aquinas was redefining a relationship between virtue and honour and placing it firmly in the sublunary, experiential domain of 'everyday' virtues. He was also correcting the equation between virtue and God

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[65] Abelard Peter, *Peter Abelard's Ethics*, Ed. D.E. Luscombe, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp 77 and 79
[66] Aquinas (1968), Op. Cit., p 57
[67] Aquinas (1968), Op. Cit., p 59
[68] Ibid.
[69] Aquinas (1968), Op. Cit., p 73

_that had been asserted by some of the early Christians._Honour and virtue were of this world and virtue was worthy in this world, whereas God and beatitude were something superior and beyond honour. Aquinas was also asserting the importance of communal opinion and respect in valuing virtue, in allocating worth and honour to the virtues of individuals.

The *telos* or purpose of human life in the Middle Ages continued to be an ultimate happiness achieved only in the afterlife, and this was clearly appropriate given the limited opportunities for happiness or flourishing in the earthly world. Virtue was the means to this end, but while virtue justified worthy honour during life, it was not the ultimate human end. The ultimate *telos* was the happiness of contemplating God, possible only through living an earthly life of perfect and excellent virtue - that is theological and moral virtue – and of course necessitating the gift of God's grace. The only security, the only absolute happiness medieval people could rely on was to be found in the afterlife. We should note that virtue was no longer enough to achieve the human *telos*. God's grace was required as well, as in the early Christian centuries, which meant that the connection between virtue and happiness was no longer a direct and exclusive relationship.

Despite the strength of the ties between virtue and communal survival, stability and flourishing up to this point, these ties were about to be loosened. The Renaissance opened up many difficult questions about virtue and morality, scepticism began to rise and a raft of different sorts of values and institutions were initiated that would – not quickly, but very slowly over the coming centuries - replace virtue as the means of community stability, order, flourishing and success.

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[70] Jaeger, Op. Cit., p 11

RENAISSANCE EQUIVOCATION, INDIVIDUALISM AND CHOICE

> [T]he Renaissance no longer knew a single, unequivocal,
> universally valid scale of values. At any given moment the
> system of values was a pluralistic one, and at the same time it
> was constantly changing; considerable differences existed, too,
> in the interpretation of one and the same value.
>
> AGNES HELLER[1]

The Renaissance began in Italy in the Fourteenth Century CE, then spread across

Europe in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries. The moral philosophy of this

period can be viewed as fairly separate Aristotelian, Platonic, Stoic, Neo-Stoic

and Epicurean debates as to what constituted happiness and the nature of ethics

and virtue.[2] There was indeed, no distinct Renaissance ethical system or moral

code and the very notion of systematisation was anathema to most Renaissance

thinkers. The fifteenth century Italian humanists deliberately set out to destroy

grand 'cathedrals of ideas' because they saw these as delimiting possibilities and

imposing rigid patterns on the solving of problems.[3] There were several reasons

for the passionate commitment of individuals to one or other or a combination of

these ancient moral visions. An obvious reason was that they were now available

to be read and discussed by a burgeoning leisured, educated class. They were

seen as vibrant and worldly[4] – in striking contrast to medieval ideas - at once new

and yet respectably ancient, and appropriate to life in the emerging new cities and

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[1] Heller Agnes, *Renaissance Man*, Trans. Richard E. Allen, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p 280

[2] For instance, see Kraye Jill, 'Moral Philosophy', in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, Eds. Charles B. Schmitt and Quentin Skinner, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp 303-386

[3] Garin Eugenio, *Italian Humanism: Philosophy and Civic Life in the Renaissance*, Peter Munz Trans., (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), p 3

[4] Burckhardt Jacob, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, S. G. C. Middlemore Trans., (Vienna and London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1937), p 260

states with their rising emphasis on nationhood, civic virtue and civic life. As Petrarch insisted 'above all... it is necessary to find first one's own self and to discover in oneself one's true humanity. Only then can one rediscover oneself as a man among men.'[5] If individuals were to find their *own* humanity, then they must be able to choose a moral vision that suited them and such a choice was only possible if there was a variety of moral options. This commitment to a diversity of views was also a backlash against the relatively univocal, systematic moral vision of the medieval scholastic, Christian, immediate past history. Renaissance thinkers wanted to be different; they wanted to reject the old values and the old way of life; nevertheless, they were deeply concerned with the collapse of morality in which they found themselves entangled.

In this chapter I shall endeavour to identify some general and significant trends and ideas that encapsulate the state of virtue in what was of course a long period of widely diverse cultural, social, political and religious experiences across Europe. I found for instance, that the humanists of Tudor England devised a fairly consistent and enduring moral vision that combined the flexibility and gentlemanly orientation of Aristotle, some of Plato's idealism, an Epicurean awareness of pleasures and a good dash of Stoic endurance. Montaigne offered an influential moral vision that criticised many of the commonplace attitudes of the time and provided a more contemporary slant on traditional Christian ideas about morality. However, it all began in Italy, where for the first time individuality, singularity, being different from one's neighbours, was not something to fear.[6]

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[5] Garin, Op. Cit., p 20
[6] Burckhardt Jacob, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, Volume 1, Dr Ludwig Geiger and Professor Walther Götz Trans., (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), p 143

This Renaissance individualism both caused and was fed by the breakdown of some aspects of the relationship between virtue and communal flourishing. The general focus for virtues - other than that iconic Renaissance virtue of magnificence - was on social order, but there was neither unity nor depth to these virtues or the sort of multi-faceted abundance of virtues found in the previous era. The suggestion emerged that it was everyday manners and customs that held society together, not virtue. There was no longer a universal set of virtues that were clearly and univocally defined - tension even existed in the definitions of the cardinal virtues. Moral education continued to be important; educational reform occurred in some places and was widely discussed. However, the long ties to religious instruction had been broken and ideas about secular moral education were by no means universal. Most of the virtues of this period were justifying an opulence and material excellence that had little to do with excellence of character or behaviour but much to do with maintaining and progressing the glory of Renaissance individuals and society. Some Renaissance virtues were strategies aimed (apparently unsuccessfully) at counteracting corruption, treachery, selfishness and cruelty. Meanwhile, specialised wisdom and knowledge was useful for action and industry, and together with flexible prudence, corresponded to the needs of exploration, discovery, innovation and invention that were hallmarks of this period. The scope of the relationship between virtue and societal flourishing was transformed in this period. Honour was no longer granted by the community, but was assumed by the individual. Shame was anathema. The happiness of the individual was no longer an exclusive matter of practising virtue but could be derived from a range of possibilities that were selected and manipulated by the individual. The flourishing of the community was certainly connected with the virtues of magnificence and wisdom,

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but we no longer find the sort of comprehensive and direct interdependence between virtue and the survival, orderliness or stability of society that was evident in the previous eras. The first denial of a *telos* for human life occurred in this period and the direct link between virtue and happiness was replaced with a competition between a range of potential sources of happiness. Motivation for virtue was also unclear as the various possibilities for motivation tended to be in conflict, rather than complementary as they had been in the past.

The association between the style of virtue and the stability of society

By the early Fifteenth Century, the word virtue or *virtu* had quite a few common meanings. It could mean the quality or property of an object, or the medicinal properties of a plant. It could mean military valour or even a military 'way of life that encouraged fortitude, valour, constancy and so on'[7]; it could also mean a physical force. In addition, it retained its traditional meaning of excellence and nobility and was often particularly linked with stoic endurance and the management of feelings. These all sound predictable, yet in a remarkable turnabout, Italian humanists such as Poggio Brocciolini asserted that work, wealth and glory were the means and signs of virtue. 'Work... is here counted as a blessing and not a punishment. It is a means for the full development of human faculties.... Wealth becomes thus almost the tangible sign of divine approval.'[8] Virtue would on this account be 'solitary and infertile' without 'health, wealth and fatherland'.[9] Virtue became directly associated with the wealth that came from work and the glory that came from wealth. Indeed, this glory was 'the tangible manifestation, the body, of virtue... the echo virtue evokes in human society and

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[7] McFarlane I. D., 'The Concept of Virtue in Montaigne' in *Montaigne: Essays in memory of Richard Sacre*, Eds. I. D. McFarlane and Ian Maclean, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p 77-78

is therefore inseparable from true civic virtue.'[10] Here we have a new way of viewing virtue that makes little or no pretence at morality as we generally understand it, but which directly maintained the link between virtue and the flourishing of societies. 'For virtue, if it is to be taken seriously, must be social and must lead to growth and to the enrichment of the commonwealth.'[11] In a similar vein, Leon Battista Alberti claimed that '[m]an is born in order to be useful to other men'[12] that is, co-operating with his neighbours and working for the betterment of the state and general economic good. However, in late fifteenth century Italy this ideal of social co-operation was overtaken by the tyranny of princes – new *Caesars* who eliminated the possibility of citizenly participation.[13] This entailed a Machiavellian sort of view where virtue and lack of scruple were not necessarily in opposition but could coexist, as exemplified by some of the ancient Roman emperors who had been strong and powerful leaders – thus excellent, thus virtuous – and at the same time, great criminals.[14] It is not clear whether this apparently contradictory attitude was a reflection of unqualified enthusiasm for all things Roman or whether it was a convenient sophistry. We should note that the actions of these tyrannous princes were not necessarily applauded (despite the otherwise revered ancient models) and for instance, Machiavelli's *Discourses* is filled with outrage against lies and tyranny.[15]

A number of Renaissance thinkers perceived an essential connection between virtue and custom or habit. Not in the Aristotelian sense - that a virtuous

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[8] Garin, Op. Cit., p 44
[9] Garin, Op. Cit., p 45
[10] Ibid.
[11] Garin, Op. Cit., p 46
[12] Quoted in Garin, Op. Cit., p 61
[13] Garin, Op. Cit., p 78
[14] Garin, Op. Cit., p 64
[15] Garin, Op. Cit., p 79

person would strive to make virtue a habit - but that habits and social customs were themselves virtue, or even that they were more necessary to social flourishing than virtue. In his widely read *Galateo*, Giovanni Della Casa wrote that testing one's virtue, proving oneself to be 'courageous, generous, magnanimous and heroic' on a daily basis was unnecessary and unrealistic. It was co-operation, polite gestures and words, and comportment - not virtue – that mattered. To fail in good manners might not be a mortal sin, but it would result in far greater social punishment than any failure of courage or generosity. Della Casa argued that 'all morality comes genuinely from living in obedience to human custom', indeed that custom provided the 'shape and substance' to practical, social virtue.[16] This development could be judged in two ways. Perhaps the content of virtue was keeping pace with whatever it was that made society operate efficiently – in this case good manners and so on. Alternatively, and this seems to be the view at the time and soon after, that morality was in decline and in urgent need of regeneration.[17]

Consistent with the general Renaissance aversion to systematisation, there was a range of opinions that claimed virtues varied according to individual temperament, social class or role, or according to the needs of the moment. For instance, Montaigne was suspicious of tabloid catalogues and definitions of virtues; he was also suspicious of the practice of looking to great men as exemplars. He argued there was not a standard model for virtue and that the temperament of each individual would be drawn to different virtues and would cause each individual to have a different focus.[18] Great men must have been greatly virtuous by temperament, so ordinary people could not hope to emulate

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[16] Garin, Op. Cit., p 170

them and must operate within their own temperament.[19] Furthermore, virtue varied essentially according to temperament, temperament was bound up with conscience and conscience was a matter of social habit. Society and social customs provided a pattern or framework within which the individual practised virtue in a way that suited his or her temperament. This was not a carte blanche, but a balance. As ever, balance was an essential characteristic of virtue and/or its relationship with other concepts – between the freedom to be oneself and the order that was necessary to and inherent in life within a human social group.[20] In addition, Montaigne explained, virtue was one of several instruments – along with judgment, experience and reason – which were applied according to temperament and luck in a flexible way in order to 'maintain a proper contact with reality... [and were thus] not just a quality, but a means, a means of existential hygiene.'[21] In other words, despite being a matter of individual temperament and social habit, virtue was a balance that both evidenced social order and flourishing, and was a means of social order and flourishing.

The Tudor humanists generally held the view that 'the character of society and state was determined exclusively by its leaders, by the kind of education these leaders had received, and the kind of moral code they had adopted as a result of this education.'[22] Sir Thomas More and Erasmus developed an educational syllabus aimed at preparing young people for useful roles, that is, leadership or governing roles, in society. Based on classical texts chosen for their humanist principles, this education was to lead students to public-minded, unselfish active

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[17] Garin, Op. Cit., p 182
[18] McFarlane, Op. Cit., p 87
[19] McFarlane, Op. Cit., pp 80-81
[20] McFarlane, Op. Cit., p 90
[21] McFarlane, Op. Cit., p 93

virtue.[23] The English humanists recognised that in their society, knightly valour and nobility of birth were not necessarily the means to success, either for the individual or for the realm. Knowledge and learning were much more useful.

> Action not based on knowledge was thought to be worthless; knowledge without resulting action was thought to be wasted. In this amalgamation of the active and the contemplative, the Platonic ideal was reborn; only he really fulfils his role in the world who, through learning and contemplation, attains the knowledge of the divine good, realises it within himself and reproduces it in his sphere of activity.[24]

Knowledge, wisdom and *active* virtue had now returned to full prominence after fifteen hundred years of prominence for the intentional and otherworldly virtues of faith, hope and charity. In this period, '[a] man with a good practical knowledge of political affairs in his own and other countries, with a knowledge of "letters" and the law, was more useful to his monarch than a chivalrous warrior.'[25] How like the Renaissance! This was the era of new discoveries, re-discoveries, world travel, a flood of books and ideas, innovative and gorgeous art works, emerging new science and technology, and the beginnings of capitalism, industrialism and the rise of the middle class. Knowledge and activity were exactly what this society needed, wanted and valued.

The public elucidation and promotion of virtue

It was also a period of great superstition and witch-hunting; greater gaps between the social classes than ever before; terrible plagues and wars; plus huge (and often bloody) social and religious upheavals. For all of its great abundance of ethical discourse, there was a kind of moral bleakness apparent throughout much of this period. Some, like Machiavelli, had mixed feelings about virtue: 'virtue breeds

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[22] Caspari Fritz, *Humanism and the Social Order in Tudor England*, (New York: Teachers College Press, 1968), p 345
[23] Caspari, Op. Cit., pp 122-123
[24] Caspari, Op. Cit., p 151
[25] Caspari, Op. Cit., p 13

quiet, quiet idleness [ozio], idleness disorder, disorder ruin; and similarly out of

ruin order is born, from order virtue, out of this glory and good fortune.'[26]

Machiavelli usually used this word *ozio* as a term of disapproval, for instance in

describing his own forced retirement from politics, despite the opportunity it gave

him for working and writing. Others, like Shakespeare, saw virtue as a losing

battle:

> Unruly blasts wait on the tender spring;
> Unwholesome weeds take root with precious flowers;
> The adder hisses where the sweet birds sing;
> What virtue breeds iniquity devours.[27]

There had certainly been no time in the past when someone could write: '[t]his

above all, to thine own self be true...'.[28] Above all... me? Now Shakespeare did

go on to make this a statement about loyalty to others and the phrase was not

generally understood - at the time - as an endorsement of individualism.

Nevertheless, it will become in the future something of a catch-cry for

individualism. Meanwhile, the negativity and general scarcity of direct comment

about virtue in Shakespeare was one of the big surprises in my examination of this

period of history.

Furthermore, the quantity and diversity of Renaissance voices produced

astonishingly extreme and polarised views on moral values in this period.

> In Castiglione's or Machiavelli's system of values 'thirst for glory' is one of the
> prime virtues; Cardano rejects it. For Vassari, 'haughtiness' is an object of
> respect; for Thomas More it is the source of the worst evil. Petrarch and
> Shakespeare deemed the passion for revenge wicked and senseless; Bacon
> places it among the positive values. 'Faith' is sometimes wreathed in respect, at
> other times it is the object of ridicule. The value of 'moderation' is central for
> Pico, but Giordano Bruno puts the immoderation of passion ahead of it.[29]

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[26] Grazia Sebastian de, *Machiavelli in Hell*, (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p 243
[27] William Shakespeare, *The Rape of Lucrece* (from L 869)
[28] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 1, Sc. iii, L 78
[29] Heller, Op. Cit., p 19

An important requirement for Renaissance virtue, revived from the ancients, was education and one of the features of the period was the opening up of education. Not just in terms of what could be studied, but also who could receive an education, how it was received and of major importance to the humanists, what education should consist in and how it should be delivered. Tudor humanist Sir Thomas Elyot explained that

> True nobility was no longer derived from birth and knightly valor alone, but was supposed to be based on man's essential quality, his ἀρετη [*aretê*] and to be expressed in deeds inspired by virtue and guided by learning.[30]

Learning had not been a notable requirement for virtue since the early Christians. Now, '[a]ction not based on knowledge was thought to be worthless; knowledge without resulting action was thought to be wasted.'[31] Nevertheless, theoretical knowledge was a significant virtue especially for the Tudor humanists. For example, Thomas Starkey saw virtue as the 'immediate emanation of knowledge' and particularly the communication of that knowledge to others.[32] Again this was not universal - Montaigne did not link learning with virtue, as he was concerned with 'the vanity of learning that can culminate in pure pedantry, self-satisfaction, and a severance from the mainstream of life.'[33] While disagreement raged over whether wisdom and knowledge were virtuous, the form of wisdom was starting to change.

> To be wise came less and less to mean possessing universal knowledge. People were wise *about something*, in plain English, they became specialists. This process was only at its very beginning, of course, during the Renaissance, but its outlines can already be perceived.[34]

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[30] Caspari, Op. Cit., p 151
[31] Ibid.
[32] Caspari, Op. Cit., p 221
[33] McFarlane, Op. Cit., p 85
[34] Heller, Op. Cit., p 291

Specialised knowledge was generally only a possibility for the leisured classes, but another important Renaissance trend was that basic education and literacy skills increased – in some cities and states quite sharply - and became relatively widespread[35]. In 1530, Erasmus wrote a 'best-selling' book called *Manners for Children*, which was not only the first book on etiquette, but was intended as a guide to universal manners and the virtues of civility for children of all classes - Catholic and Protestant. This book and its successors – which, reflecting growing class and religious anxieties, inserted specific manners and virtues for various religions and classes - became enormously influential. It was translated into many European languages and appended with basic educational tools such as a primer, in order to make it the principle textbook for the education of European children - aged between seven and twelve - over the next three centuries.[36]

The pro-society quality of virtue

The virtue of courage

There is an interesting tension to be found in the Renaissance attitude toward courage. In line with the courage of one's convictions and constancy, as exemplified by the martyrs and Christian tradition to date, the Renaissance virtue of courage was a civil matter rather than a martial one. For example, 'Romeo's steadfastness in observing the imperatives dictated by his love... Cordelia's truth-telling, Emilia's rebellion are all examples of... civil courage.'[37] Yet constancy and steadfastness of convictions was surely unachievable or inapposite in an era

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[35] Castan Yves, Lebrun François and Chartier Roger, 'Figures of Modernity' in *A History of Private Life, Volume 3, Passions of the Renaissance*, Roger Chartier Ed., Arthur Goldhammer Trans., (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), pp 112-115

[36] Revel Jacques, Ranum Orest, Flandrin Jean-Louis, Gélis Jacques, Foisil Madelaine and Goulemot Jean Marie, 'Forms of Privatization' in *A History of Private Life, Volume 3, Passions of the Renaissance*, Roger Chartier Ed., Arthur Goldhammer Trans., (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), pp 168-173

characterised by an unprecedented multiplicity of voices, opinions, values and ideas, and a desire to overthrow authority and systems of thought. This suggests that courage, as constancy, was a stabilising mechanism (or at least an attempt at stabilising) for a society that had been unsettled by the disappearance of a universal morality. Alternatively, courage as constancy could have been a backlash to this disruption or it could be a matter of clinging to a past excellence even though it was no longer a necessary or even appropriate strategy for communal flourishing.

The virtue of justice

Sir Thomas Elyot wrote that without justice 'all other qualities and vertues can nat [sic] make a man good'[38] yet much of what was written about justice in the Renaissance was concerned with institutional and public justice rather than personal fairness and equity. The availability, firmness and impartiality of courts, 'stern punishment of rebels' and maintenance of political and social order were of paramount importance for the Tudor humanists.[39] There was also – among the Italian humanists - a strong flavour of justice and laws being the means to controlling the 'mob and the common people', while educated, serious, intelligent people had no need of laws because their characters would automatically cause them to be virtuous.[40] We will find this us-and-them attitude was also common among the Enlightenment *philosophes* of the Eighteenth Century. Burckhardt explains that in Renaissance Italy:

> Each individual, even among the lowest of the people, felt himself inwardly emancipated from the control of the State and its police, whose title to respect

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[37] Heller, Op. Cit., pp 301-302
[38] Caspari, Op. Cit., p 183
[39] Caspari, Op. Cit., pp 349-353
[40] Garin, Op. Cit., p 34

was illegitimate, and itself founded on violence; and no man believed any longer in the justice of the law.[41]

Here we have yet another kind of equivocation in the virtue of justice – justice was understood as the means of controlling people, yet the same people had no respect for justice.

The virtues of self-control and moderation

During the Renaissance, self-control, temperance and moderation were all considered desirable, but as virtues they lacked much of the discipline and rigor of previous eras. The asceticism of the previous Christian periods was still evident for some groups such as the Puritans and Calvinists, but not the rest. The focus for self-control in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* was more about managing sorrow and dreariness than the more traditional Christian concerns with controlling pleasures and lusts.[42] For Montaigne moderation was 'the refusal of excess or lopsidedness, and ... the preliminary to the good health of one's being.'[43] Montaigne's idea of moderation was aimed at discouraging fanaticism, martyrdom, heroism and greatness, and was encapsulated as 'Je propose une vie basse et sans lustre'.[44] However, a basic or simple life without gloss and glamour is hardly the image we have of Renaissance life with its gloriously elaborate clothing, art and architecture. As with virtue in general, self-control was no longer a simple, singular standard, in this case an ascetic standard, but was now generally viewed as a method for living and was synonymous – for some - with autonomy and freedom. 'Its component elements are a recognition of one's position, a feeling for one's concrete possibilities, a willingness to adjust one's

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[41] Burckhardt (1937), Op. Cit., p 233
[42] Cummings Robert, 'Spenser's "Twelve Private Morall Virtues"' in *Spenser Studies: A Renaissance Poetry Annual,* Princeton, NJ. 1987; 8:35-59, p 46
[43] McFarlane, Op. Cit., p 93
[44] *Essais,* iii.2, 782 (b); GF 20 quoted in McFarlane, Op. Cit., p 96

desires *and goals* to the given situation and given possibilities, and a relative degree of contentment.'[45] Temperance was now largely a flexible equivocal value, relative to the individual and aimed at balancing the uncertainties, justifying the excesses and allowing for the new possibilities of the age.

The virtues of wisdom and prudence

With retrospect, we can see that wisdom and knowledge about specialised subjects were a requirement and a trigger for the rise and development of industrialisation, capitalism and the associated rise of the middle classes. Prudence and especially self-knowledge were also important in this period. Montaigne for instance, stressed the importance of 'know thyself', an ancient maxim that will be crucial for the Enlightenment philosophers. Self-understanding was needed to distinguish between good and bad, to recognise the source of one's motivations and to determine (in line with one's temperament) which sorts of virtue could and should be practised. For Montaigne, virtue was closely 'linked to a conscious urge to discover the truth about ourselves.'[46] The Shakespearean statement about being true to self resonated with this as well. By contrast to this internal sort of view, Machiavelli considered prudence in very pragmatic terms.

> The new prince must learn to regard the traditional qualities as virtue or vice merely at first blush, as good or bad prima facie, as only seemingly good or bad. To do so would be to act prudently, for whenever the prince uses them as means they may prove to be the reverse of what they are traditionally classified. He may adopt them as useful, and therefore good, if on examination no bad effect is likely to follow, and drop them if they endanger the chosen end.[47]

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[45] Heller, Op. Cit., p 289
[46] McFarlane, Op. Cit., p 84
[47] De Grazia, Op. Cit., p 309

In this light, prudence became an act of reason applied to choosing the right action ___ for the individual and the situation he finds himself in, but it was also used to juggle the priority virtues. This was something of a general trend.

> The concept of *phronésis* took on a new meaning. Not only must general values be applied in a manner appropriate to the individual, concrete situation; in each concrete situation the hierarchy of values must constantly be re-created, with some values being rejected and others reinterpreted, in the search for the 'mean value' between the general and the subjective-individual, between what is demanded and what is possible.[48]

This notion of a flexible, individual hierarchy was paralleled in the social hierarchy. Society continued to be hierarchical, but people were no longer necessarily locked in to the class into which they had been born.

> A man with a good sense of business, with an eye for enlarging and exploiting his land, had a fine chance of improving his lot, of becoming not a 'knight' - although he still might receive that title - but a 'gentleman'...[49]

This social dynamism encouraged a corresponding flexibility in the definitions and hierarchy of particular virtues – people needed and wanted to be able to adjust their values to the various social circumstances in which they found themselves. Thus, people with the skills and capability to move through the social structure particularly needed prudence in order to adjust their values and behaviours accordingly. However, there remained traces of more traditional views as well. For Elyot, prudence consisted of: honour toward God, maturity and moderation, foresight, consultation, decisiveness, experience, modesty, industry and circumspection[50] - a prudent blend of old Christian values and the new appreciation for active, efficient industriousness.

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[48] Heller, Op. Cit., pp 307-308
[49] Caspari, Op. Cit., p 13
[50] Elyot Sir Thomas, *The Book named The Governor*, Ed. S.E. Lehmberg, (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd, 1970), pp 78-85

The virtue of magnificence

The Renaissance virtue of magnificence was a Homeric sort virtue – to do with glory, nobility, material excellence, and not really a matter of character (as it had been for Aristotle and to some extent Aquinas) or moral behaviour at all.

> [Magnificence] entailed the appropriate expenditure of large sums of money for public buildings, religious offices and the like... [it] enjoyed a considerable vogue in the Renaissance, to some extent because it could be used as a suitably classical compliment when praising wealthy patrons such as Cosimo de Medici.[51]

Personal excellence, as evidenced by material wealth and nobility, by either birth or acquisition, typified the virtue of magnificence in this period. Think of the unprecedented opulence of fabrics and jewels that we see in the paintings of this period, and the astonishing sums of money spent by kings and queens, princes and popes on art works for cathedrals, palaces and their own personal collections. Aquinas' sense of magnificence, as doing great deeds in order to achieve heavenly happiness also persisted. For example, Spenser's Arthur was a character who achieved all the virtues finally arriving at magnificence that was 'demonstrated in doing great things, in "working his own perfection" which is the best that mortality can do, but its promise consists in partaking of the divine nature.'[52] Naturally, in this era of disagreement, there were many people who disapproved of magnificence and all its trappings.

> [Florimonte] maintained that men were so inclined to pursue pleasure that it was practically impossible for them to use wealth well because they were unable to resist the many opportunities for dissolute living which it offered them. The Calvinist Florens Wilson, who had an even lower opinion of human nature, thought it very rare indeed for a wealthy man to avoid the besetting sin of pride.[53]

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[51] Kraye (1988), Op. Cit., p 332
[52] Cummings, Op. Cit., p 41
[53] Kraye (1988), Op. Cit., p 332

Perhaps magnificence had to be a virtue if the full potential of this period – its art, its exploration, its artisans and its extraordinary personalities – was to be exploited or lavishly displayed in all its glory. Indeed, to be human in the Renaissance was to be practical - business like, money oriented, success oriented, Aristotelian, pragmatic, that is, concerned with what is possible rather than absolute values. At the same time it was to be idealistic - Platonic, concerned with abstract ideas, beauty, order, bookishness, promoting the ideas of Utopias and education for all sorts of people. Thus to be magnificent was entirely consistent with simply being a human in the Renaissance. It was also a necessary component of being individually human. As the medieval barriers between classes became less concrete and people of different classes lived in closer proximity to each other, a new means of standing out from the crowd became necessary. Burckhardt explains that the modern form of glory, fame, celebrity became the moral postulate that governed individual aspiration and achievement.[54] This drive for glory was ostensibly a drive for excellence and virtue, but 'amid all the preparations outwardly to win and secure fame the curtain is now and then drawn aside, and we see with frightful evidence a boundless ambition and thirst after greatness, independent of all means and consequences.'[55] The Renaissance virtue of magnificence was the least equivocal of all the major virtues of this period. Yet, its connection to societal flourishing, as such, was surely ambiguous.

The virtues of honour, loyalty and courtesy

Honour had been an outcome or a marker of virtue for the ancient Greeks, though as we have noted before, in the later stages of the Roman Empire it was a political

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[54] Burckhardt (1958), Op. Cit., p 162
[55] Ibid.

reward representing ambition rather than virtue. The early Christians had resisted

connections between virtue and honour until Aquinas finally gave it respectability

again as an outcome or motivation for virtue. In Renaissance literature, notably in

Shakespeare's Horatio, honour 'came to occupy the very pinnacle of the hierarchy

of values.'[56]

> The honest man was the one who could be counted on, who was there to help
> when there was trouble, who would not commit treachery. These were the
> simplest and most elementary values, but at a time when all other values were
> uncertain these fixed, elementary values could become central.[57]

Loyalty was a value that could no longer be taken for granted. Loyalty of a

servant to a master had become problematic, as new class loyalties were emerging

with the growing interest in equality. Loyalty could no longer be reliably bought -

betrayal and treachery were commonplace – and loyalty that had been freely and

autonomously chosen was now preferred.[58] Furthermore, '[d]uring the

Renaissance it became self-evident once more that it was possible to be "true" to

an idea, belief, or *Weltanschauung*[59], that this kind of fidelity was more binding

that any personal tie'[60] thus reflecting the ancient position 'I love Plato, but I love

truth more'. Moreover, what comprised the truth that deserved fidelity would

have to be a matter for the individual to choose.

Courtesy, as a Renaissance virtue, was more than good manners or the

frills and formalities of behaviour at court, though it was certainly these things

also. It was exemplified by the Tudor humanists, but it was common to major

cities and especially courts elsewhere. Courtesy was very much class and gender

bound. The courteous Renaissance gentleman – like the agreeable Athenian

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[56] Heller, Op. Cit., p 293
[57] Ibid.
[58] Heller, Op. Cit., p 294
[59] Philosophy of life or world view
[60] Heller, Op. Cit., p 298

gentleman - behaved according to his station in life, being respectful, affable or firm as appropriate. He would also enforce his moral values on 'recalcitrant, law-breaking members of his own class,' and fight anyone who threatened his position, class or idea of justice.[61] This courtesy required courage and commitment to moral values as well as generosity, especially among the gentlemanly group.[62]

These three virtues – honesty, loyalty, courtesy – were each aimed to some extent at social order and the problems faced by Renaissance society of selfishness and corruption. They were perhaps the only virtues, other than magnificence, that had a clear relationship to what communities and society perceived was needed to thrive in this era. On the other hand, given the picture we have from the history of this period, society at this time was thriving on corruption, power abuse, exploitation and the aggrandisement of individuals. As with courage and constancy, these virtues might have been reactionary and a matter of clinging to values of the past.

The virtue of friendship

Friendship was important for the Tudor humanists and was emphasised in the works of Sidney, Elyot and Spenser as being closely connected with communal, indeed cosmic well-being. Friendship between good people provided the strength necessary to meet the difficulties faced in establishing and maintaining a good state. Friendship was 'a harmonious and unifying force' that both created and was concord – the world was held together by love and friendship.[63] For Montaigne, friendship comprised 'Moderation, loyalty, consistency, pleasure, tactile quality

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[61] Caspari, Op. Cit., p 354-355
[62] Cummings, Op. Cit., p 51
[63] Caspari, Op. Cit., p 307 and p 339

(*polissure*), warmth of feeling and avoidance of total independence.'[64] However Montaigne did not view friendship as a virtue *per se*, rather he saw it as something necessary for virtue. For Montaigne, virtue required the presence of other people and was justified and validated by two external reference points – God and friendship. Furthermore, virtue only existed because it could be externalised – and for Montaigne the means to this were friendship and writing.[65] Friendship would have been necessary or desirable for the co-operative ideal of early Italian humanism, but it fell by the wayside in the sixteenth century Italian culture of tyranny and distrust. Thus, it is problematic to view friendship as a characteristic Renaissance virtue.

The virtue of piety

Only Spenser, among many sources, included piety (or holiness) as a significant virtue - yet for all their rejection of the Scholastic system, Church authority and the multitude of Christian virtues, the people of this period were still, by and large, practising Christians. Countless people died for their religious beliefs - think of the brief but bloody reign of Queen Mary. The Reformation swept through large parts of Europe and was embraced by communities where the sort of magnificence and luxury described above was unknown or irrelevant. Piety seems to still have been a virtue and central to life in some parts of Europe, but elsewhere was perhaps becoming more of a social custom.

The significance of public recognition and motivation for virtue

This period was surprisingly modern in the considerable collection of sometimes conflicting motivating factors that might impel people to practice the virtues. Machiavelli was blunt about the role of self-interest; though he recognised that

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[64] McFarlane, Op. Cit., p 99

self-interest need not necessarily conflict with virtue and goodness. He suggested that ethical principles and values were only certain of motivating virtuous behaviour when they coincided with self-interest. He also suggested that while virtues and ethics had a certain level of autonomy and power, they were themselves often determined by interest. Furthermore, he argued that pursuing one's own interests might lead to good, but only when these interests were in harmony with good values and virtues.[66]

Machiavelli also recognised that choice, circumstances and opportunities had an important role to play. If one's children were penniless and starving, one had no choice but to steal, that is, in certain circumstances one could not choose to be virtuous. Furthermore, if one was powerful and able to avoid punishment, one could choose to do wrong in ways that others, lacking such power, could not so easily choose.

Montaigne was interested in the disparity that could occur between virtue and the appearance of virtue. He saw that what appeared to be a virtuous response might in fact merely be a horror of cruelty, poor judgment, anger, pride, or the mellowing of old age, and so on. He argued that true virtue had to be autonomous and motivated for its own sake – anything else was mere appearance of virtue.[67]

The Renaissance educational reforms, as well as works on Utopias and the nature of society were aspiring to achieve motivations for virtue that overtly made connections between individual moral choices and the success and good of society. Many Renaissance people were interested in the creation of a 'good' society and they saw leaders educated in the virtues to be the primary means of

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[65] McFarlane, Op. Cit., p 100
[66] Heller, Op. Cit., p 319
[67] McFarlane, Op. Cit., pp 78-80

the social development they sought. Meanwhile the old motivating factors of heaven and hell, Church and religion, together with the *very* old ones of glory and honour were all part of the debate as well. However, shame was so far from being a quasi virtue that in this period it did not even seem to be a motivating factor. Montaigne remarked (unhappily, I think) that 'repentance, so far from constituting a virtue, is taken to be a reneging on one's essential being.'[68]

Thus, we find deep tension between the old Christian ideas about what motivated virtue and new concerns about self-interest and what we might call self-deception – placing value in what may only be the appearance of virtue. Given that virtue was now a matter of personal temperament, luck and circumstances, then the motivation for virtue would tend to be an individual matter as well. The decline of both shame and the importance of community response – who needs a reputation for excellence when one's material wealth and opulent way of living were visible for everyone to see and could even signify God's approval – were also manifestations of this new individualism and individual choice.

Along with the range of conflicting possibilities for the motivation to virtue was a 'bewildering diversity' of opinions about the source of human happiness. Again, these opinions were conflicting and seemed to reduce to individual choice. Montaigne wrote that people found happiness in virtue, pleasure, following nature, knowledge, the absence of pain, or in 'not being deceived by appearances'.[69] Happiness was no longer to be found exclusively in the practice of virtue and we should note that happiness from the contemplation of God did not even make it into Montaigne's lengthy list. Pico Della Mirandola explained at an important international meeting of humanists that everything has a

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[68] McFarlane, Op. Cit., p 83

nature - a particular way of being and behaving – except humans. 'Man alone has no nature which determines him and has no essence to determine his behaviour.'[70] The individual created himself and his only compulsion was to 'be free and ... choose his own destiny'.[71] Thus, each individual chose what would make them happy. Heller writes that happiness was now a 'category of everyday life' rather than an ethical concept. It was significant to the individual; it was understood in terms of its content for the individual and it continued to be a matter of rational choice by the individual, but by the Renaissance happiness was ethically neutral.[72]

The age-old link between virtue and community leadership was also beginning to deteriorate. Machiavelli's prince was lord and master of his principality – through either inheritance or conquest – but his link with the territory and the people was 'external... fragile and continually under threat'[73]. His role was not to protect, strengthen and enhance the flourishing of his domain, but to retain, protect and strengthen his ownership. This was achieved by the prudent and highly contingent application (or lack of application) of virtue, described earlier in this chapter. Here we have a significant change from the role of say a leader in Periclean Athens, whose virtue aimed at making a direct contribution to societal flourishing.

Over the previous three chapters, we saw a series of diverse modes of human transformation through virtue. Hellenistic virtue transformed individuals such that they could create a sense of order and community while standing back from the chaos and alienation of Imperial society at large. Early Christian virtue

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[69] Kraye (1988), Op. Cit., p 317
[70] Garin, op. Cit., p 105
[71] Ibid.
[72] Heller, Op. Cit., pp 286-287

—transformed individuals into people who created close-knit, 'alien' communities that were often deliberately and directly in confrontation with mainstream society. Medieval virtue transformed people in such a way that they could cope with all manner of disasters and difficulties and thus ensure the survival of family, clan, community, Church and society as a whole.

Underpinning the relationship between virtue and societal flourishing were the same innate tendencies of humans - to foster reciprocal relationships, divide their labour, and depend on each other – which we observed in the Greek eras. Throughout these centuries from the Macedonian Empire to the beginning of the Renaissance, virtue was the only known way of life that was supportive and conducive to the order, stability and some level of trust between people that were necessary if people were to live together in social groups. I would argue that virtue could only have been the way of life if there were no other possibilities – and there apparently were none until the Renaissance – and while virtue delivered the stability, order and so on that society needed to flourish. The intriguing question that the history of Renaissance virtue raises is: 'What came first?' Did the mutual, reciprocal relationship between virtue and societal flourishing deteriorate leaving a vacuum to be filled by other values and institutions, or did the new ideas and possibilities push virtue from centre stage? Were individualism and scepticism – two factors that will become even more prominent in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries – the means to this deterioration or the result? I suggest there is more evidence of the former, though certainly the break down of the relationship between virtue and societal flourishing seemed to encourage and promote individualism and scepticism.

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[73] Foucault Michel, 'Governmentality' in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*,

The Renaissance marks the time in history when the motivations for virtue became unclear, diverse and contradictory, and when virtue – previously always in a direct, exclusive and reciprocal relationship with happiness – began to compete with many other possibilities. This tension was also reflected in the extremes of optimism and pessimism that people had toward virtue in this period. The optimism of the early Italian humanists and the relative pessimism of the later ones can perhaps be understood simply in the light of the political tyranny of the later period. The optimism of the Tudor humanists and their profound concern with virtue, and the pessimism and absence of direct references to virtue in their contemporary Shakespeare seems more difficult to reconcile. Montaigne found the need to argue against sceptical and pessimistic people who 'teach us that the questing after virtue is rugged and wearisome'.[74] Meanwhile, some of the important mechanics of civilisation – values, shame and blame, honour and praise – had been disrupted.[75] The Renaissance and then the Reformation disenfranchised and opened to question established truths about morality, virtue, happiness and religion. People in the Renaissance could (and carefully did) question the scientific rationality of the notion of immortality, casting a shadow over the Christian foundation of ethics. Humanists such as the sixteenth century Pietro Pomponazzi insisted that a rejection of 'at least the rational certainty of immortality, cannot, however, shake the foundations of ethics'[76] because '[v]irtue and happiness are... two aspects of the same reality.' Nevertheless, doubts had been exposed. Not merely from virtue's association with immortality, religion

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Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller Eds., (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991a), p 90
[74] Montaigne Michel de, *The Essays of Michel de Montaigne*, Trans.and Ed. M. A. Screech, (London: Allen Lane Penguin Books, 1991), pp 90-91
[75] Rothwell Kenneth S., 'Hamlet's "Glass of Fashion": Power, Self and the Reformation' in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, Eds. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick H. Hutton, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), p 81

and the Church, but also because of a new awareness – through travel and the dissemination of books – that other cultures and other religions had different moral rules. How could people know what God 'really' wanted if there was more than one system of values? Scepticism about the Church, religion, authority of all kind and virtue, together with the shift from community ethos to individual choice depending on temperament, luck, circumstances and personal beliefs and preferences, were two of the key factors that will ultimately break down the link between virtue and societal flourishing.

By the end of the Renaissance, virtue was a shaky, uncertain, equivocal concept, open to a raft of choices by the individual. Some of the most important virtues of this era might have been closely associated with the flourishing of society, but they had little to do with what we understand as moral excellence of character and far more to do with wealth, power and celebrity. Whether these particular virtues supported a desirable sort of flourishing might have been open to debate, but it is hard to see – in hindsight – how the steamrollers of modernity and individualism could have been stopped. The Seventeenth Century will see even greater scepticism, more options and possibilities for human choice and the first failures of virtue to be represented as a science. In a world where, increasingly, only those things that could be understood scientifically were considered real, this will be failure indeed.

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[76] Garin, Op. Cit., p141

THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY SEARCH FOR A MORAL SCIENCE

[T]hey, who consider men by themselves and as though they
existed outside of civil society, can have no moral science
because they lack any certain standard against which virtue
and vice can be judged and defined.

THOMAS HOBBES[1]

This chapter will examine the state of virtue in the Seventeenth Century, not because this century was a clearly identifiable, differentiated historical era, but because it formed a bridge between the ideas of the Renaissance and the ideas of the Enlightenment. An examination of the ideas about virtue and the virtues in the Seventeenth Century enables us to understand how the meanings and significance of these values and concepts evolved.

There had been very little that was systematic about moral philosophy or ethical thinking in the Renaissance. Knowledge had been valued highly, but it was generally - and preferably - a chaotic, colourful, equivocal inundation of information, not a scientific, systematic and univocal kind of knowledge. The principal characteristic of seventeenth century moral philosophy was the new goal of creating a science of ethics and morality. This aim to discover one fundamental, universal virtue, value or moral law that explained, supported and justified ethics would continue to be a notable theme in the Eighteenth Century. However the idea that a science of morals could be established without denying the role of God - Malebranche, Spinoza and Leibniz all gave God a central place in their scientific theories on ethics - was much more typical of the Seventeenth

Century than the Eighteenth. Indeed, for Leibniz the quest for scientific knowledge was in itself the ultimate form of worship and of loving God. Loving God and searching for new scientific understanding were equivalent and this unity provided the source of happiness.

How do we explain this return to prominence of God as central to human morality? The Renaissance humanists, while not atheists, had sought concepts of morality and virtue as human ideals – not surprising given their fascination with the ideas of ancient Greece. Only the Tudor humanist Sir Thomas Elyot had argued strongly for virtue as beatitude. '[C]ontemplation of the divine and eternal good makes man similar to God. From it derives his virtue; virtue is active application in the world of the divine good which he has beheld.'[2] A view that seemed somewhat medieval, though perhaps placed a little more emphasis on active worldliness than had been common before the Renaissance. One obvious explanation is that many of the prominent seventeenth century philosophers were living in northern Europe – places that had not been hotbeds of Renaissance humanist thinking, such as Italy and England – though arguably all of Europe had been influenced by these ideas. A second explanation would be that the apparent atheism of so much humanist thinking – especially in Italy – had been just that – apparent. Humanism was repositioning ideals in the human domain rather than the divine domain, even though the majority of people continued to be devout practising Christians. It was also the case that Renaissance rejection of Church authority did not generally include rejection of God. Third, there had been a backlash against the atheism or apparent atheism of sixteenth century, Italian

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[1] Hobbes, *De homine* (ch 13.8) quoted in Tuck Richard, 'Hobbes's Moral Philosophy' in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, Ed. Tom Sorell, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p 180

[2] Caspari, Op. Cit., p177

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humanist thinking.[3] I suggest all these were contributing factors, but that the second theory is the most explanatorily successful. The decline of Christianity took place over many centuries. In the Renaissance a whole raft of new ideas were being overlaid and integrated into what were still fundamentally Christian ideas and values. These new ideas were interesting and exciting, but we should remember that the whole history of Christianity was one of incorporating, adapting and assimilating other people's ideas. We could therefore view the seventeenth century approach to virtue and ethics – with its attempt at integrating new science and rationality with old bedrock ideas about the central place of God – as a re-balancing of the pendulum, albeit perhaps a temporary balance.

By the end of the Seventeenth Century, the relationship between virtue and societal flourishing had deteriorated significantly. The concepts of virtue and virtues, which had so dominated the Western way of life, were now nudged aside in favour of concepts of passion and natural law, which seemed to offer more potential in the search to find abstract theoretical scientific explanations for morality. This search for a science became the centrepiece of the response to the problem of scepticism. However, scepticism and the lack of a universal set of virtues inherited from the maelstrom of Renaissance thinking were not remedied by the rational and scientific thinkers of the Seventeenth Century. Indeed the problem was compounded by the redefinition of many old virtues as passions – with a silent 'mere' hovering in the background. Moral education as always was important, but was largely based on books and values from the Renaissance. None of the notable seventeenth century philosophers offered any sort of comprehensive analysis of the particular virtues. Hobbes was vitally concerned

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[3] Burckhardt (1958), Op. Cit., pp 272-278

with social order and social flourishing which he argued could only be achieved through justice, but he shifted justice out of the realm of virtue and redefined it as a natural law. Prudence – sound understanding and judgment - was presumably necessary for a society that valued rational and scientific thinking, but no one felt the need to document or discuss it as a virtue for this period. The scope of virtue had almost completely narrowed down to the realm of the individual - in terms of the way virtue that was defined, the way virtues (or passions) were generally defined and the motivations that were described for virtue. This is somewhat ironic because Hobbes and Locke were writing about how virtue could not be understood except within the context of human society and communal living. The old ideas about a human *telos* – opened up to question in the Renaissance - had now been 'disproved' by science. A new goal of using science to discover a human nature that would explain virtue had come to prominence and would continue to be widely pursued in the Eighteenth Century. Furthermore, motivations for virtue focused on benefits for the individual, with little or no concern for communal opinion.

The association between the style of virtue and the stability of society

The goal of discovering a science of ethics gave rise to a variety of theories about the nature of virtue. Four such theories were Leibniz's theory about the perfection of the will, Spinoza's theory about self-preservation, Grotius' theory about natural law and the widespread interest in the passions as a scientific explanation of morality.

Leibniz theorised that virtue was essentially the perfection of the will and the intellect. (This was not in itself a new idea, but had been proposed by Ockham in the Middle Ages.) The intellect was perfected by the imposition of

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order on things and by the development of scientific theories (this *was* a new idea)—
- and these were achieved via one's reason. The will was perfected through the
governing and ordering of passions, again via reason. These reasoning processes
were an imitation of God's wisdom in ordering the world. The idea was that
people became most perfect, most like God by loving – and they loved because it
was reasonable to love in proportion to the divine virtue that could be seen in
others.[4] However, Leibniz explained, this sort of love required considerable
intellectual capacity – the person must scientifically know God - therefore perfect
virtue was dependent on scientific education and was thus achievable only by an
elite. The practical consequence of Leibniz's equation between happiness, virtue
and human good was that individuals and states would be obliged to promote
universal education in the sciences.[5]

Spinoza explained that the essence of anything was the act of
endeavouring to persist in being itself, therefore the essence of virtue was the
power of a human to persist in being himself; that is, the endeavour of self-
preservation and the preservation of one's own advantage. He did not mean
persisting in being generically human, but persisting in being that particular
human.[6] Virtue and endeavour, in Spinoza's view, were linked. Endeavour, the
essence of self-preservation, defined the natural power and activity of the thing
and the human's power, activity or capacity for self-preservation *was* virtue. In
this respect, Spinoza saw virtue as instrumental and necessary for self-
preservation, but he also claimed we ought to want virtue for its own sake, that

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[4] Brown Gregory, 'Leibniz's Moral Philosophy' in *Cambridge Companion to Leibniz*, Ed.
Nicholas Jolley, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p 428
[5] Gregory Brown, Op. Cit., pp 411-413
[6] Spinoza, *Ethics*, Trans. Andrew Boyle, Introduction T.S. Gregory, (NP: Heron Books, ND), 4p20

there is not anything preferable to it, or more useful to us.[7] Furthermore, he claimed that acting from virtue and acting under the guidance of reason was the same thing.[8] There was no hint of any consideration for a social context or a community ethos in these ideas about virtue. They placed virtue firmly in the domain of the individual – alone with his thoughts about nature and God.

There was fairly general agreement that a science of morality could be somehow based on the concept of natural law. Grotius – whose work was highly influential in this century and the next - presented humans as simultaneously sociable and self-interested. His view was that people were sociable because they could not survive alone and because they found pleasure in the company of other humans, but at the same time, they were unsociable because they tended to be independent and competitive. He saw *natural law* as the explanation for how people lived together co-operatively, despite being rational, thinking individuals. Grotius saw justice and virtue as both a protection against the conflict that was inevitable in any social group, given the *unsociable sociability* of humans, and as the means of sustaining society.[9]

Other important theories concerned the passions: their relation to moral life, to virtue, and how they could or should be controlled. It had been generally assumed in the past that virtue and reason opposed vice and passion, but the Seventeenth Century saw a significant change in that relationship. It gradually became quite widely accepted that some of the passions had a role in recognising good and evil, some had a role in reason itself, and that not all passions were destructive and treacherous. Passions could be understood as the 'buds of virtue'

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[7] Spinoza, Op. Cit., 4p18
[8] Spinoza, Op. Cit., 4p24

and by distinguishing between passions and interest, and between calm passions and violent ones, a scientific understanding of ethics might be achieved.[10]

We might well ask what did these theories have to do with living and flourishing in the Seventeenth Century. Not a great deal, it would seem. As the Seventeenth Century progressed life became more sumptuous, mannered, ostentatious[11] - think of the Restoration and the reign of Louis XIV – good taste, appearances and civility were what counted most.[12] More and more people were learning to read and in the process were discovering 'the seductions of the self', giving priority to privacy and domestic intimacy[13] and, I would argue, retreating further and further from community values, common life and universal virtue as a way of life. There was awareness that ethical science was not having the desired effect on the community at large. 'Many people were unable to understand [the notion of ethical science], others understood but remained unmoved, and even its most fluent practitioners sometimes failed to act on the conclusions of their own proofs.'[14] Yet, Leibniz had been convinced that science not only would improve the mind of the individual thinker, but it would improve the material quality of human life in general.[15] This tension between theories and practice, and disappointment that a science of morality was not solving any problems, caused philosophers and moralists to increase focus on techniques for directing and

[9] Schneewind J. B., 'Locke's Moral Philosophy' in *The Cambridge Companion to Locke*, Ed. Vere Chappell, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp 209-210)
[10] James Susan, 'Reason, the Passions, and the Good Life' in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, Eds. Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p 1391
[11] Chartier Roger, 'Epilogue' in *A History of Private Life, Volume 3, Passions of the Renaissance*, Roger Chartier Ed., Arthur Goldhammer Trans., (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), p 610
[12] Revel *et al*, Op. Cit., pp 306-307
[13] Chartier (1989), Op. Cit., p 610
[14] James, Op. Cit., pp 1377-1378
[15] Gregory Brown, Op. Cit., p 341

controlling emotions, cultivating and perfecting dispositions.[16] Some of these

techniques and exercises were for discerning people to apply to themselves, but

many were intended to modify the passions and behaviours of others. Just as we

saw a class-based discrimination - that subtly (or not so subtly) blamed others for

the 'moral degradation' of society while assuming the moral high-ground for

themselves among Renaissance thinkers - this attitude persisted and even

increased over this century and the next. In the Eighteenth Century – in what was

perhaps an extension of this attitude - we will find the beginnings of overt and

deliberate intervention by the State in the morality and happiness of individuals.

Yet despite the growing absence of a connection between societal

flourishing, the way of life for individuals and the practice of virtue, seventeenth

century philosophers such as Hobbes and Locke were arguing that virtue was the

'meanes to peacable [sic], sociable, and comfortable living'.[17] Furthermore, as

Hobbes explained, ethics could not be understood (scientifically that is) except

within the context of a social group.

> [T]hey who consider men by themselves and as though they existed outside of
> civil society, can have no moral science because they lack any certain standard
> against which virtue and vice can be judged and defined.[18]

This has been interpreted as meaning '[i]f a conventional moral language, with

notions of duty or virtue, is inapplicable outside a particular civil society, then of

course there can be no traditional ethics.'[19] It was also taken to support the

sceptical position that virtue was entirely relative and therefore an empty concept.

Alternatively, as I suggest is clear from the history I have outlined so far, ideas

about virtue - such as that virtues were habits, virtue was wisdom, virtue was love

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[16] James, Op. Cit., p 1378
[17] Hobbes, quoted in Kraye (1998), Op. Cit., p 1306
[18] Ibid.
[19] Tuck, Op. Cit., p 180

- were not passed down the centuries pristinely, but were adapted and refined in each era. Virtues and ideas about virtue were periodically rediscovered, modified and tailored to suit the needs of the place and time. The point that I think Hobbes was making was that there was no such thing as personal or individual ethics, or a personal set of moral values, only ethics within an ethos - that it made no sense to separate virtue from society. However, Hobbes was incorrect in equating mores and virtues, because while it is clear that certain social customs – such as polygamy and fighting duels were 'praised by some and condemned by others' - these mores had never been accorded the status of virtues *per se*. Nevertheless, there was clearly a relationship – just not an equality - between the set of values that were called manners and the set of values that were called virtues. We saw earlier claims that manners and mores were more necessary to social flourishing than virtues, or that they were virtues themselves during the Renaissance.

In a similar vein, Locke noted that 'The general agreement that virtue is praiseworthy can be explained as a result of the general awareness that virtue is useful to society.'[20] He also remarked that 'Vertue [was] the highest Perfection of humane Nature [sic]' and was 'necessary to the preservation of Society, and visibly *beneficial* to all, with whom the Virtuous Man has to do.'[21]

The irony (from a twenty-first century perspective) is that at the same time that this important relationship – between virtue and the survival and flourishing of society – was being recognised, examined and discussed, virtue itself, as a compelling way of life that enabled societies to flourish, was on the wane. Actually virtue was not just quietly declining; it was under attack from several directions. Scepticism about morality, which was becoming evident in the

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[20] Schneewind, Op. Cit., p 200

previous period, had continued to grow and even works by people such as Locke who were trying to combat scepticism were being read and criticised as if they were promoting it. Despite the growing religious scepticism, seventeenth century European and British societies continued to be predominantly Christian and devout. However, the fifteen hundred-year association between virtue and religion, the grounding of Christianity in practical morality and virtue, had by now been swept away in significant sections of society by the Lutheran pronouncement of virtue as outside the realm of human endeavour.[22] The third and possibly most significant and enduring source of attack was the new science. Virtue seemed to defy scientific analysis and proof. Certainly, no one was able to define a set of Newtonian style laws that were persuasive and widely accepted. In a world where science was explaining nature in new and exciting ways it looked like virtue might not be explainable in this way and therefore might have no reality. In addition, the very act of attempting to create an ethical science – even when it aimed, as Hobbes' work did, to support rather than undermine conventional morality – was seen by readers to be materialistic, deterministic, atheistic and egoistic. The very process of attempting to describe ethics as a science was taken to be a threat to Christian values.[23] This is not surprising. Unquestioning obedience had been central to Christian morality and values for more than

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[21] Yolton John W., *A Locke Dictionary*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), pp 315-316

[22] By contrast with the rationalist perspective, the notion that virtue was a gift from God had been revived and given prominence again by Luther in the previous era. Increasing numbers of people joining (increasing numbers of) Protestant sects viewed virtue as not only something that was given by God, but were committed to the notion that no amount of effort by the individual could achieve it. In the Lutheran view, morality had nothing to do with reason and virtuous effort was irrelevant. This was because a moral life was available only through righteousness – and righteousness was a gift of God, rather than any kind of human achievement. The person aspiring to a moral life must passively believe and hope that 'God will give them the "alien righteousness, instilled in us without our works by grace alone" which is the only means to salvation.' See James, Op. Cit., p 1382

[23] Kraye Jill, 'Conceptions of Moral Philosophy' in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, Volume 2, Eds. Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp 1305-1306

fourteen centuries – this sort embedded, fundamental value could not be swept aside quickly. Rational Christians like the Cambridge Platonists also objected to Hobbes' account of ethics.

The public elucidation and promotion of virtue

In their concern to find scientific and fundamental laws to explain morality, seventeenth century rationalists had relatively little time for the particular virtues. Spinoza asserted that the 'Christian "virtues" [such] as humility, repentance and pity are not virtues at all but evils, because they are all species of sadness and hence indications of lack of power.'[24] Hope was an emotion and an inconsistent, contradictory, possibly even irrational one at that. 'Hope is an uncertain pleasure arison [sic] from the idea of a thing past or present, the event of which we still doubt to some extent.'[25] Neither benevolence nor modesty were virtues according to Spinoza, but were merely 'the desire of doing such things as please men and omitting such as do not.'[26] Meanwhile Hobbes redefined repentance, hope, pity, charity and magnanimity as passions or emotions and he described them in the same manner as his descriptions of admiration, weeping, laughter, lust and indignation.[27] Hobbes did not go so far as to call humility an evil, but he did describe it as 'the passion which utterly cows a man, that he neither dare speak publicly, nor expect good from any action.' We might imagine that Hobbes and Spinoza were not reliable sources for an examination of Christian virtues, being perhaps prejudiced by their own beliefs. However, nor had these virtues been promoted in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* or in Sir Thomas Elyot's lengthy

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[24] Garrett Don, 'Spinoza's Ethical Theory', in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, Ed. Don Garrett, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p 305
[25] Spinoza, Op. Cit., 3d12
[26] Spinoza, Op. Cit., 3d43
[27] Hobbes Thomas, *The Elements of Law: Natural and Politic*, Ed. Ferdinand Tönnies, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), pp 30-33

analysis of virtue in *The Governor*, written in the previous era. Both of these works continued to be enormously popular in the Seventeenth Century and were viewed as excellent material for moral education.

Young British boys continued to be taught the classical education syllabus devised by More and Erasmus, and throughout Europe, children were still being educated using books based on Erasmus' *Manners for Children*. The universities were teaching a syllabus based on Aristotle and the majority of people were practising Christians. Indeed Locke was convinced that 'only an understanding of morality to which God was essential could win the assent of the vast majority of Europeans'.[28] Locke was notably concerned with the importance of education and virtue. He proposed strict guidelines for training and manipulating the desires of children 'from their very Cradles' to ensure they found pleasure only in virtuous or moral behaviour.[29] Locke argued that such education was necessary because people had no innate sense of what was right and what was wrong. However, what virtues and morals were to be taught? I could find no seventeenth century descriptions of the virtues that were not repeating values from the Renaissance period or earlier. Why was there no distinctly seventeenth century virtue catalogue, not even a rough collection of vaguely shared values as we found in the Renaissance?

The pro-society quality of virtue

The Seventeenth Century had an odd sort of parallel to that earlier time of single-mindedness about virtue – the Hellenistic era. Nearly two thousand years earlier, the focus on endurance and management of fear had meant there was little

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[28] Schneewind, Op. Cit., p 219

[29] Colman John, *John Locke's Moral Philosophy*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983), pp 230-234

attention paid to many of the particular virtues. In this century, the particular virtues were again given scant attention, but this time it is because of a single-minded focus on the pursuit of a scientific law or a theory that would rationally explain the whole of virtue. We find that the concepts of justice and prudence were held to be important to societal flourishing, but that they were not virtues as such any more.

Hobbes maintained that justice was both one of the laws of nature and a legal obligation of the citizen. He examined the mutual trust and dependence between people living in a society and found it could only be 'dared' if each could rely on a certain level of justice from the other.[30] Hobbes was also highly concerned with issues of civil order and authority in the aftermath of the death of Charles 1 and the Commonwealth. The legal justice system and the necessity of obedience to constituted authority were important themes in Hobbes' work and both of these aspects of justice and just behaviour were necessary, in his view, to social order and flourishing.

Leibniz also considered justice to be highly significant - but in a very different way. He constructed a legalistic three-tiered system of justice that encompassed all the old virtues. First, *personal justice* or prudence was motivated by self-interest and could be encapsulated by the precept 'Harm no man'. Second, *social justice* or the social virtues was motivated by a sense of humanity and was described by the precept 'Give each man his own'. The third level, *spiritual justice* or the moral virtues was motivated by religion and expressed by the precept 'Live righteously'.[31] This venture at a science of virtue as justice was

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[30] Hobbes, Op. Cit., p 65
[31] Hostler John, *Leibniz's Moral Philosophy*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers Inc., 1975), p 56

interesting for the absence of any significant concern with or importance placed in social order or even mere social mechanics. Leibniz's system was concerned with virtue and justice as a matter for individual rather than societal flourishing. Justice for Leibniz was motivated by the individual's knowledge of God - who provided a perfect exemplar - and the individual's knowledge that all acts of justice and injustice would be, respectively, rewarded and punished. Furthermore, Leibniz's definition of justice – charity of the wise – saw justice and virtue as a synthesis of love and prudence in the moral agent. Virtue was a rational love of God, giving the agent such pleasure that altruism became possible without diminishing individual welfare, and was then tempered by prudence to form the notion of justice.[32] Justice and virtue, in this science, were matters that fell within the domain of the individual and God only. Over the history I have outlined so far, many of the virtues had been defined and described as matters of individual choice and behaviour. However, it was rare indeed for justice – the most obviously socially oriented of the virtues, and the only one that could not possibly be practised alone – to be treated as a solely individual matter.

Prudence on the other hand was often mentioned – named that is, not comprehensively described – as a virtue and we might imagine that prudence and wisdom should have been important virtues when rationality and scientific thinking were so highly esteemed. However, perhaps it was the case that if rationality and scientific thinking could not discover a law to explain morality and virtue, then wisdom and prudence could not be real virtues.

There is very little potential for finding interdependencies between social flourishing, cultural, social and political needs and problems, and the virtues *per*

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[32] Hostler, Op. Cit., p 54

se in this period. Hobbes linked his ideas about natural law and justice to social concerns of the time, but his contemporaries and almost all the thinkers of the next century displayed an urgent need to deny the scepticism, anti-religion, doubt and gloom they perceived in his work. Unless things such as good taste – in literature, music, architecture, gardening, clothing, food and so on – or social distinction were elevated to the status of virtue - and I have found no evidence that seventeenth century thinkers asserted or even implied this – then what actually made society flourish in this century had little or nothing to do with what had traditionally been understood as virtue. The drift we saw in the previous period - toward individual choice, individual conscience and the goals of satisfying individual desires and sense of self, and away from the sort of community oriented social ethos that had underpinned virtue throughout all its preceding history - had grown into an irreversible tide.

The significance of public recognition and motivation for virtue

Meanwhile, it was not only the particular virtues that were under threat from new ideas. The human *telos* and its connection with virtue - in fact teleological thinking in general - was also challenged by the new science. Scholastic physics had long claimed that all things had a purpose – as ordained by God - and things had an innate tendency to move toward their 'natural sphere'. The newly discovered principle of inertia demonstrated that in fact when left to itself a body would continue to move according to its last influence. Non-teleological physics raised a serious question mark over traditional notions of Christian human teleology (that the purpose of human life was to know and love God) or the even older *telos* of *eudaimonia* or human happiness and flourishing in the world. It also accentuated the possibility that there was no particular human nature – that humans were 'essentially unstructured and completely open to external

influence'.[33] If there was no human *telos* to be achieved via the practice of virtue, then 'Why be virtuous?' suddenly became a crucial question.

Perhaps as a remedy or backlash to these findings, the Seventeenth Century saw the beginning of a new sort of *telos*, with some thinkers seeking evidence of moral qualities or faculties in human nature and social institutions. This teleological or providential naturalism will be central to mainstream Enlightenment thinking in the next century, but it too will not provide enough evidence to make the awkward question of 'Why be virtuous?' disappear.[34] Meanwhile, many seventeenth century thinkers continued to offer traditional teleological approaches to human life, virtue and happiness. For instance, Locke insisted that people constantly seek happiness and that it cannot be defined in entirely earthly terms. 'The complete achievement of happiness is not possible here on earth, but only in Heaven.' Locke argued that human life in this world was a 'pilgrimage... under probation', that the terms of this probation could only be fulfilled by good actions and that this was the only means to true (heavenly) happiness.[35] Likewise, Leibniz continued to privilege eternal life as a motivation.[36]

The motivations for virtue in the Seventeenth Century were also notable for their apparent lack of prominence for community values and opinions. Leibniz described a continuum of three motives for virtue – consideration of one's own happiness, consideration of the happiness of others and finally the

[33] Norton, Op. Cit., pp 87-88
[34] Haakonssen Knud, 'Divine/Natural Law Theories in Ethics' in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, Eds. Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p 1351
[35] Colman, Op. Cit., p 3
[36] Hostler, Op. Cit., pp 65-66

'conscience' that comes from an awareness of God.[37] However even Leibniz's

motivation from consideration of the happiness of others had an undertone of:

because that would make me even happier. As in the Renaissance, shame –

except as a means of educating the passions of children within the family

context[38] - rated little mention from seventeenth century thinkers and did not

apparently involve serious concern for community opinion. Spinoza merely

stated that 'Shame is pain accompanied by the idea of some action of our own

which we imagine others to blame.'[39]

While the new science and rationalist ideas were clearly adding to the

undermining of moral beliefs and values that had begun in the last period, these

ways of thinking were not perceived as the danger to virtue, *per se*. There was a

strong desire to accommodate scientific and rational ideas into morality and blame

other factors for the threat. Scepticism and religious enthusiasm were both seen

as major hazards to the decency and stability of society[40] and provided much of

the impetus for thinking and debate about morality and virtue in this century and

the next. We have reached a point in the history of virtue where a significant

proportion of the population was committed to a view that no amount of earthly

effort could achieve virtue. Many of the rest had doubts about the relevance of

virtue to their own life and happiness. The rationalism and science of the

Seventeenth Century, aimed at dispelling the worrying doubts and scepticism of

the previous couple of centuries had in fact produced more scepticism and worry.

No one had been able to make a science of virtue or at least not a science that was

convincing. Eighteenth century thinkers will view this as a crisis and concerted

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[37] Hostler, Op. Cit., p 60
[38] Colman, Op. Cit., p 231
[39] Spinoza, Op. Cit., 3d31
[40] Schneewind, Op. Cit., p 219

but ultimately unsuccessful efforts will be made, on both sides of the Channel, to find a remedy.

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY MORAL CRISIS

> Where is happiness to be found? Who knows it? Everyone is
> looking for it, but nobody finds it.
>
> JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU[1]

Rousseau was no doubt a bit of a pessimist and other Enlightenment thinkers were

determined to be more optimistic – nevertheless everyone agreed that finding a

universal answer to this crucial question was a great concern and difficulty. The

age-old link between happiness and virtue could no longer be taken for granted

and did not seem capable of a rational explanation, justification or proof that

would be universally accepted. In a variation on seventeenth century goals,

eighteenth century thinkers placed their hopes in the notion that something

essential in human nature could be discovered in a 'single interpretive principle' –

along the lines of Newton's law of gravity – and that this would be the key to a

universal morality and happiness.[2] The Socratic recommendation 'Know Thyself'

was seen by the Enlightenment *philosophes* as both the invitation to moral self-

mastery and the means to a universal moral science.[3]

Beyond this hope in the discoverability and enlightenment of human

nature, any unity that might be found in the Enlightenment thinkers certainly did

not include unanimity. Some persisted tenaciously in their Christian beliefs,

while others explored atheism and materialism. Some remained loyal to old class

structures and dynastic authority, while others developed new ideas of democracy

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[1] *Ouvres complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (III, 349) quoted Grimsley Ronald, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, (Brighton, Sussex and Totowa, New Jersey: Harvester Press, 1983), p 12
[2] Ibid.
[3] Gay Peter, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation - The Rise of Modern Paganism*, (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1966), p 81

and freedom.[4] A few were academics or held university positions, but most were not – the universities for the most part persisted with a syllabus that was founded in Scholasticism and overlaid with the humanist agenda set in the Renaissance. Aristotle was central to the university syllabus and anathema to most Enlightenment thinkers. They also '... patronized Plato, ignored the Neoplatonists, and ridiculed Augustine, but they inherited, despite themselves, a wide range of Platonic ideas, largely through the Stoics and such modern Platonists as Galileo.'[5] There was great admiration for Cicero and the intellectual independence of the Enlightenment thinkers was tied up with eclecticism. The idea of eclecticism had great appeal and Diderot explained that an eclectic was not just lazily putting together bits and pieces from other people's philosophy, but was strenuously examining potential principles and only accepting those that had merit according to personal experience and reasoning.[6] There seem to have been two significant consequences arising from this taste for eclecticism. One was that many old ideas were revamped (with or without acknowledgement) in this period. The other was that Enlightenment ideas did not always fit together cohesively, as we will see, giving rise to more doubts, dilemmas and scepticism.

By the end of this century we will find that virtue, if it had reality at all, constituted a bundle of choices made by the individual to suit his or her own preferences, level of education, ideas of what was rational, needs, capabilities and circumstances. The search for a science of virtue and morality had failed – neither passion, natural law, nor human nature had provided a way to the sort of compelling Newtonian explanation for ethics that the Friends of Morality were seeking. This failure in fact compounded the problem – by the end of the

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[4] Gay, Op. Cit., p 4

Eighteenth Century there were even more possibilities for the sceptical, pessimistic or just plain puzzled individual moral agent to choose between and be doubtful about. The confusion over virtues and passions in the previous century had now been compounded by debates about naturalness and artificiality. There was no sense of a universal set of values, and relativism – alluded to by seventeenth century thinkers such as Hobbes - had raised its ugly head. Moral education was still highly valued, but it was based largely on values that had been adapted to Renaissance society. There was little analysis of the individual virtues and of those that were examined, only Hume's virtue of greatness of mind had any sort of relevance to societal flourishing in the Eighteenth Century. However, this was not surprising – the goal for Enlightenment thinkers was to make a science, to theorise, not to articulate the set of values that suited their particular times. Virtue had become a matter of individual choice between options as to the nature of virtue, the motivations for virtue and the qualities that were to be valued as virtues in oneself and others. The immediate relevance to societal survival and flourishing that had made virtue and the virtues so compelling in the past had now receded. There were suggestions about a teleological virtue associated with human nature, along with many other proposals as to what motivated people to be virtuous, but the very nature of the sceptical approach to thinking about these motivations made them debatable and weak. As we might expect, even when motivations involved other people, they were mostly described in terms of the moral individual. The sense of motivation for virtue being a public or communal concern had been largely overtaken by the motivations of self-esteem.

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[5] Gay, Op. Cit., pp 82-83
[6] Gay, Op. Cit., p 160

The goal of a scientific, rational explanation for morality presupposed and encouraged a sceptical approach, but at the same time, this goal was driven by an urgent desire to refute scepticism and reinforce the reality of virtue and morality.[7] In short, this moral scepticism maintained 'that there are no valid moral arguments, that morality has no rational basis and that the difference between right and wrong is merely a matter of taste, opinion or convention'.[8] Response to this crisis took the form of either refuting these views, or trying to find ways to accommodate them within a new moral vision that also incorporated traditional moral values.

The question of human nature was the starting point for much of the moral debate in the Eighteenth Century: Were people by nature completely selfish or co-operative? What was the role of God and religion in human nature and morality? How did people discern the difference between virtue and vice and was this a natural facility or an artificial one? It is important to remember that everyone now agreed that human nature was part of nature in general – this had been hotly debated in the Renaissance. Further, that human nature was being examined in the context of amazing, new scientific developments that were dramatically changing the way people understood nature in general. On both sides of the Channel, there was considerable debate over whether people were naturally good/benevolent or naturally bad/self-interested. There was also widespread concern over the relationship and/or the declining relationship between virtue and society and there was an abundance of answers for the question of what was virtue in this period.

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[7] Norton, Op. Cit., pp 11-13
[8] Marcus Singer, *Generalization in Ethics*, pp7-8, quoted in Norton, Op. Cit., p 12

The association between the style of virtue and the stability of society

For Hume, virtue was something sensed – people contemplated a particular kind of character, then had a feeling of a particular kind of satisfaction or pleasure. 'The very *feeling* constitutes our praise or admiration... We do not infer a character to be virtuous, because it pleases: But in feeling that it pleases after such a particular manner, we in effect feel that it is virtuous.'[9] Hume identified this feeling as a certain kind of love, a sympathy or identification with the other character and also perhaps an aesthetic kind of love - something like the love of beauty. Not everyone agreed that virtue was a feeling of pleasure. For instance, Wollstonecraft found the equation between virtue and pleasure trivialising and diminishing of virtue. She argued it offered only a veneer of respect for virtue and ignored the hard work and life long effort that virtue involved.[10]

Closely related to the idea that the *feeling* constituted virtue, was the moral sense theory that Hume, Hutcheson and others explored. Virtue was to be found in the character itself, which promoted certain feelings or had certain values or affections that promoted those same feelings. The feeling or sensation was secondary to the source of the sentiment, which for many, including Hutcheson, was benevolence.[11] Benevolence – in various guises - had of course long been considered a virtue, so the moral sense theory was part of the long tradition of offering one of the virtues as the essence of virtue. This was also a return to the notion of virtue being part of the character – not, as Aristotle would have it, the

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[9] Hume David, *Treatise of Human Nature*, Ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p 471
[10] Wollstonecraft Mary, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men, and A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, (Köln: Könemann Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 1998), p 174
[11] Stewart M. A., 'The Scottish Enlightenment' in *British Philosophy and the Age of Enlightenment*, Routledge History of Philosophy Volume V, Ed. Stuart Brown, (London: Routledge, 1996), pp 279-280

character's disposition that had been acquired via practice and habituation – but an affection or passion which a character displayed. The moral sense theory was also perhaps an adaptation of the traditional Christian idea of love as the source of virtue.

Shaftesbury, who has often been associated with the moral sense school, in fact had a somewhat different notion about what made a person virtuous. Virtue was to do with the character using reason or judgment *and* sentiment or senses. It required equity or justice, and most importantly for Shaftesbury it required reflection, that is, thinking or reasoning about feelings. [12] This comprehensive and quite balanced view, for which Shaftesbury would acknowledge a debt to the Stoics, seems to be yet another adaptation of Aristotle's ideas on the importance of deliberation and balance, and the relationship between justice and virtue.

There was considerable disagreement in this period as to whether benevolence was or was not the whole of virtue. A major element of the human nature debate was the question of whether it was human nature to be entirely selfish, self-interested or self-loving, or entirely benevolent and altruistic. Not surprisingly, no one provided a really compelling argument either way, but I have found only one writer – John Brown – who pointed out that humans were not entirely one thing or another, but generally displayed a blend of self-interest and altruism. [13]

There was a common sense theory, widely supported among the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment, which held that people had certain fundamental moral convictions that could not be explained by reasoning, that is,

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[12] Cooper Anthony Ashley, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times,* Ed. Lawrence E. Klein, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p 173

they were commonsensical. There was a great deal of argument over whether or not these convictions were instinctive - naturally or as a result of experience - a reflection on experience, or religiously instinctive.[14] The common sense theory assumed that as all reasoning was ultimately based on unprovable first principles, so then moral reasoning must be as well. Therefore there must be first principles, or self-evident principles to do with morality and these principles were what could be called common sense. There could be no reasoning with a person who did not have these common sense principles – for instance that benevolence was preferable to malice, justice to injustice – any more than one could reason with a tone-deaf person about music.[15] There seem to have been echoes of this common sense idea in Rousseau as well, though not explicitly. He suggested that the principles of virtue were 'engraved on the human heart' and were more readily available to 'simple souls', presumably rather than sophisticated, educated ones. Rousseau claimed that to understand virtue a person needed to do no more than 'withdraw into himself and listen to the voice of conscience in the silence of the passions.'[16]

Hume was of course famous for his claim that 'moral distinctions are not deriv'd from reason'[17], that morality and virtue were 'felt rather than judg'd'[18] and that these feelings stemmed from calm passions.

> Since morals... have an influence on the actions and affections it follows, that they cannot be deriv'd from reason; and that because reason alone, as we have already prov'd, can never have any such influence'.[19]

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[13] Monro D. H., (Ed.), *A Guide to the British Moralists,* (London: William Collins Sons & Co Ltd., 1972), p 111
[14] Stewart, Op. Cit., pp 288-292
[15] Stewart, Op. Cit., p 293
[16] Grimsley, Op. Cit., p 19
[17] Hume, Op. Cit., p 455
[18] Hume, Op. Cit., p 470
[19] Hume, Op. Cit., p 457

Hursthouse argues that 'reason alone' would have to mean without using any notions of good or evil and that the difficulty of defining (and explaining) moral reason in this way was perhaps the reason Hume abandoned this position in his later work.[20] Many people disagreed with Hume's initial claim and viewed the discernment of virtue and vice as a fundamentally rational process, though often also acknowledging the participation of sentiments. Shaftesbury argued that the universe was 'a well-ordered, intelligible system, in which humans have their proper place. By the use of unaided natural reason we can discover what role we are designed to play in that system and thus live virtuous and happy lives.'[21] Wollstonecraft argued that reason, knowledge, virtue and perfection were intertwined. She explained that reason was the emanation of divinity, the 'simple power of improvement' and of discerning truth - that exercising reason perfected the soul. Thus, virtue or the perfection of the self would be achieved through reason. Interestingly, she also stated that '[e]very individual is in this respect a world in itself.'[22]

We can view these ideas – the above survey is a sample only and does not encompass them all – as a vibrant, creative, enthusiastic investigation into the nature of virtue and morality. The problem was that none of them could be proven – a serious dilemma when engaged in science – and they could not all be 'true'. Virtue and morality could not be the compelling universal way of life it had been for centuries past when the individual had to make choices about what it meant and how it worked, when every individual was his or her own world.

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[20] Hursthouse Rosalind, 'Hume: moral and political philosophy' in *British Philosophy and the Age of Enlightenment,* Routledge History of Philosophy Volume V, Ed. Stuart Brown, (London: Routledge, 1996), p 183

[21] McNaughton David, 'British moralists of the eighteenth century: Shaftesbury, Butler and Price' in *British Philosophy and the Age of Enlightenment,* Routledge History of Philosophy Volume V, Ed. Stuart Brown, (London: Routledge, 1996), p 204

Moreover, if what virtue meant and how it worked was a matter of individual choice, then clearly these theories could not be explaining or promoting a universal science or a universal way of life. Furthermore, as MacIntyre asserts, when virtue became a matter of individual feelings and passions, society became 'nothing more that an arena in which individuals seek to secure what is useful or agreeable to them'.[23] The general needs of societies – order, stability, concord, glory, advancement and so on – could never be met by uncoordinated individual feelings and sentiments that stemmed from an insistence on individuality. People obviously continued to live in societies, but increasingly, 'the spirit of the age was individualistic'[24]. In a further shift, that began in the Eighteenth Century, but would remain a minority view until the Nineteenth Century, morality as Rousseau articulated and demonstrated it was a matter of 'inner conviction and self-knowledge' rather than externally verified reasoning and community values. Morality, in this view, was 'not so much a codification of relations between individuals as an inner conviction of innocence.'[25]

In addition to the important question about the source of virtue and the way it related to human nature, the question of moral relativism – largely triggered by Hobbes' work - was a major cause for concern. Whereas relativism might be viewed as a positive thing – respect and tolerance for diversity, understanding that values did not have to be the same for their holders to be good – it could also be viewed as profound scepticism. If values were relative then perhaps they had no reality. Many of the Enlightenment thinkers sought to identify something fundamental and universal to underpin morality that could also

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[22] Wollstonecraft, Op. Cit., p 147
[23] MacIntyre (1984), p 236
[24] Revel *et al*, Op. Cit., p 325
[25] Revel *et al*, Op. Cit., pp 389-390

account for relativism among the details. In *A Dialogue,* Hume tried to 'fix a standard' that could be defended as a universal moral code and would allow for the differences of virtues and values to be found in diverse societies and times. He argued that looking beyond the approved practices of, for example, pederasty (in ancient Greece) and duelling (in contemporary France) it could be seen that approval of these practices stemmed from principles of friendship, sympathy, mutual attachment, courage, honour and fidelity – about which no one would disagree. It was these source principles – if not the specifics - that gave rise to praise or blame rather than the particular activities themselves.[26] We can see from the preceding chapters of this thesis that this was a valid position. The values placed on certain activities, such as pederasty and duelling – and we might add many others – changed from time to time, but the general principles of friendship, generosity, wisdom and justice remained fundamentally the same. In a similar manner, Shaftesbury argued that there were certain things which, regardless of custom, social convention, fashion, law or religion, could not be virtuous - such as 'treachery, ingratitude or cruelty', persecution of friends, tormenting prisoners of war, offering human sacrifice and so on. He viewed these as fundamental, 'immutable', universal values.[27] However, this was not general agreed. As influential and widely read as Hume and Shaftesbury were, people such as Mandeville were equally convincing in the opposite view. Virtue and morality thus had only a fifty-fifty chance – either individuals decided that these concepts were objective and real, or that they were relative and empty.

Thinking about another aspect of the nature of morality, Diderot suggested that people were either born with a disposition to behave helpfully toward society

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[26] Hursthouse, Op. Cit., p 189

or with a disposition to be harmful – either possibility being a matter of chance. He also believed (along with most of the Enlightenment *philosophes*) that certain fundamental moral criteria – that comprised a universal morality - existed. This of course begged the (unanswered) question of why some people were born unfortunate and did not share in the moral code. Another inconsistency or dilemma associated with this perspective on human nature and the nature of virtue was the conviction that moral standards were not absolute but were acquired through learning and experience. [28] However, Diderot could not explain how someone born 'unfortunate', without a disposition to understand moral standards, would be able to learn moral standards.

Hume's notion of the artificiality of many virtues exposed another aspect of the relationship between society and virtue. Hume categorised virtues as either natural – dispositions that people held and approved of naturally – or artificial – dispositions that involved some invention or artifice in order to come into being.[29] In other words, the division between natural and artificial correlated to the division between psychology and sociology. Hume's dichotomy between natural and artificial virtues seems to have centred on motive. In a nutshell, justice could not be natural because the motive for honesty was not readily explained by self-love, public interest or benevolence - either generally or specifically to the person one was being fair toward. Therefore the only obvious motive for being honest was being honest itself, which was either a circular argument or a 'sophistry' and

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[27] Shaftesbury, Op. Cit., p 175
[28] Jimack Peter, 'The French Enlightenment II: deism, morality and politics' in *British Philosophy and the Age of Enlightenment*, Routledge History of Philosophy Volume V, Ed. Stuart Brown, (London: Routledge, 1996), pp 257-258
[29] Mackie J. L., *Hume's Moral Theory*, (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), pp 76-77

could not be derived from nature, but only from education and conventions.[30] It turned out that the systematic and broad-based approval of virtues, even in strangers, and even in enemies, made Hume's notion of sympathy inadequate and an artificial, sociological system was necessary to explain even his natural virtues. The argument for artifice and the distinction from nature were tremendously complex. It was also weak, though excusable in part, for example, because Hume believed honesty was too 'strange and *prima facie* pointless' to be instinctive or natural - but he could not know 'what strange and elaborate instincts many animals have been given by natural selection and evolution'.[31] Hume's theory was further complicated by the fact that the motivation for the natural virtues – sympathy – also played a part in the artificial virtues.[32]

Mandeville had a profoundly sceptical and pessimistic view on the link between society and virtue. He argued that virtue was an illusion perpetuated by education and dishonest politicians, that it was like fashion – uncertain and intangible – and only appeared to exist because people – in their pride – had been flattered into thinking they were or could be good, noble and virtuous. Indeed, Mandeville argued that successful societies were built entirely on vice, not virtue at all - that honesty and virtue lead to unemployment and the disintegration of society.[33] Of course, the Friends of Morality, including Hume, responded to this with the full force of their eloquence and reasoning, but the fact remained that both sides were plausible, and neither side could provide indisputable scientific proof for their theory.

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[30] Mackie, Op. Cit., p 77
[31] Mackie, Op. Cit., pp 80-81
[32] Mackie, Op. Cit., pp 121-122
[33] Norton, Op. Cit., pp 64-65

The aims of eighteenth century thinking about virtue and morality appear to have been irreconcilably in conflict. On the one hand, there was a strong desire to think about virtue and morality scientifically. Galileo had argued convincingly that nature could only be understood and its effects predicted by determining its mathematical structure. Anything that did not have a mathematical quality was not *real* but merely 'affections, secondary qualities, "mere names" masquerading as "primary phenomena".'[34] If they had no mathematical or scientifically describable structure then virtues and morality, good and evil could not be the objective things they had been when fact and value were intertwined in the Scholastic way of thinking about the world.[35] Yet in an odd sort of contradiction, the scepticism that this scientific way of thinking made inevitable was also attractive - because it resonated with the *humanitas* espoused by that great Enlightenment hero, Cicero.

> The man who practiced *humanitas* was confident of his worth, courteous to others, decent in his social conduct, and active in his political role. He was a man, moreover, who faced life with courageous skepticism: he knows that the consolations of popular religion are for more credulous beings than himself, that life is uncertain, and that sturdy pessimism is superior to self-deceptive optimism.[36]

Enlightenment thinkers wanted to be courageously sceptical; they wanted to avoid self-deception and credulity at all costs. On the other hand, there was a strong desire to hold on to the old moral objectivity, to hold on to traditional values and to refute the very idea of moral scepticism. Ironically, the *philosophes* appear to have been convinced that the way out of this dilemma was to persist in their scientific empiricism, in the expectation that human nature was scientifically knowable and that when it was known, the laws of morality would be indisputable

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[34]. Norton, Op. Cit., p 22
[35] Ibid.
[36] Gay, Op. Cit., p 107

and everyone would be thereafter happy. D'Holbach opened his *Systême de la nature* with the sentence: 'Man is unhappy only because he does not know nature'. In other words, scepticism could be overcome by thinking sceptically.

However, did these theories and the sceptical, empirical approach to thinking about virtue contribute to the flourishing of society? Apparently, not in any direct, orderly sense as in the past, but Enlightenment thinking did inspire many individuals to build hospitals, found schools, support humane causes and engage in other such benevolent activities.[37]

The public elucidation and promotion of virtue

Whereas the Seventeenth Century had seen new interest in the link between society's needs and virtue, the Eighteenth saw recognition of a much more detailed, explicit and direct relationship. The closing words from Shaftesbury's *Inquiry concerning Virtue and Merit*, which was influential on both sides of the Channel throughout much of the century, concluded with a clear statement about virtue and societal flourishing. Virtue was that which 'upholds communities, maintains union, friendship and correspondence amongst men, that by which countries, as well as private families, flourish and are happy...'[38] D'Holbach was another who stressed the relationship and stated that 'virtue is everything that is truly beneficial, everything that is constantly useful to the individuals of the human race, living together in society'[39]. He said that the most important virtues were those which produced lasting benefits to the individual and which preserved

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[37] Gay, Op. Cit., p 23
[38] Shaftesbury, Op. Cit., p 230
[39] Thiery Paul Henri, Baron D'Holbach, *The System of Nature, or The Laws of the Moral and Physical World, Volumes 1 and 2*, Trans.M. de Mirabaud, (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1984), Vol. 1, p 149

the order of society.[40] In fact d'Holbach argued that 'without virtue society can neither be useful nor indeed subsist; it can only have real utility when it assembles beings animated with the desire of pleasing each other, and disposed to labour to their reciprocal advantage...'.[41] This had clearly been true in the past when virtue correlated neatly to the particular cultural, social and political circumstances that societies and communities faced. However, how could virtues be providing this service in the Eighteenth Century if no one could or would explain what the virtues now were?

The pro-society quality of virtue

Enlightenment thinkers produced numerous ideas and analogies about the nature of virtue, what it was like, what it involved and how it could be recognised. Nevertheless, like their seventeenth century predecessors they had little to say about the particular virtues.

Hume examined the virtues of justice and honesty in some detail and he mentioned chastity and modesty in this category, without explaining their virtuousness. Hume's primary concern was with his argument as to why justice was artificial, but he also provided glimpses of what he meant by justice.

> Now justice is a moral virtue, merely because it has that tendency to the good of mankind; and, indeed, is nothing but an artificial invention to that purpose. The same may be said of allegiance, of the laws of nations, of modesty, and of good manners. All these are mere human contrivance for the interest of society.[42]

> By 'justice' [Hume] means primarily the sort of honesty which respects what are regarded as the rights of owners of property. He quotes the traditional definition of justice as '*a constant and perpetual will of giving everyone his due*' [Treatise III,ii,6], but he interprets this mainly as protecting everyone in the possession and use of what belongs to him and in the right to transfer his property voluntarily to someone else.[43]

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[40] D'Holbach, Op. Cit., Vol. 1, p 150.
[41] D'Holbach, Op. Cit., Vol. 2, p 10
[42] Hume, Op. Cit., p 577
[43] Mackie, Op. Cit., p 77

Interestingly, Hume included equity as a separate and natural virtue, although this had usually only been considered a part of justice. In addition Hume appeared to have been aware of the necessity of justice – together with some sort of equity, fidelity and honest promise giving - to the interests and well-being of society.[44]

Of the many natural virtues he named, only greatness of mind and benevolence were singled out and again, little information was offered about them as virtues *per se*. Hume's virtue of greatness of mind was a 'genuine and hearty pride' that was suitably controlled, avoided undue vanity and provided the sorts of courage and enterprise that were useful for both the individual and society in general.[45] According to Hume, the merits or virtues of generosity, humanity, compassion, gratitude, friendship, fidelity, zeal, disinterestedness and liberality formed the 'character of good and benevolent'[46], but he provided no details of what these meant in practice. He also explained that 'Courage and ambition, when not regulated by benevolence, are fit only to make a tyrant and public robber.'[47] Goodness or benevolence, the two seem to be synonymous for Hume, were to do with love - which was the 'agreeable sentiment, which is excited by sympathy' with these qualities.[48] Meanwhile, Hutcheson identified three kinds of benevolence.

> One is a calm, extensive goodwill directed equally toward all beings capable of happiness or misery. Another is 'a calm deliberate affection... toward the happiness of certain smaller systems or individuals; such as patriotism... friendship or parental affection' - but parental affection of a judicious, self-controlled, sort. The third consists of various passions of love, pity, sympathy, or what he calls 'congratulation', that is, immediate pleasure in the observed happiness of someone else.[49]

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[44] Mackie, Op. Cit., pp 99-101
[45] Mackie, Op. Cit., pp 125-126
[46] Hume, Op. Cit., p 603
[47] Hume, Op. Cit., p 604
[48] Hume, Op. Cit., p 605
[49] Mackie, Op. Cit., pp 28-29

Thus, for Hume and Hutcheson, benevolence seemed to be a superset of virtues and a sort of regulator or controller of virtues as well.

Hume excluded a number of characteristics that had been sometimes thought of as virtues, arguing that these were in fact natural abilities that could not be learned. He noted, for example, that no amount of exhortation would make a naturally foolish person prudent. These involuntary merits also included constancy, industry, patience, vigilance, temperance and frugality.[50] Butler also had some doubts about prudence as a virtue.

> It should seem, that a due concern about our own interest or happiness, and a reasonable endeavour to secure and promote it, which is, I think, very much the meaning of the word *prudence* in our language; it should seem that this is virtue, and the contrary behaviour faulty and blamable; since in the calmest way of reflection, we approve of the first, and condemn the other conduct in ourselves and others.[51]

It *should* seem like a virtue, but Butler was ambivalent about prudence because it was more a case that people disapproved of folly than approved of prudence which, he claimed - like religion - taught people to be 'interested and selfish'.

Moderation was crucial for Shaftesbury, not surprisingly given his commitment to universal balance and harmony. It was central, along with justice and equity, to Shaftesbury's highly influential ideas about virtue and the passions.

> Nor will it be found necessary after this to call to mind the excellence and good of moderation, or the mischief and self-injury of immoderate desires and conceited fond imagination of personal advantage in such things as titles, honours, precedencies, fame, glory, or vulgar astonishment, admiration and applause.[52]

Wollstonecraft offered an interesting slant on modesty that, while it may not have been a widespread view, certainly resonated for instance with Jane Austen's dismissiveness of conventional modesty. Wollstonecraft described modesty as a

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[50] Hume, Op. Cit., pp 610-611
[51] Monro, Op. Cit., p 175
[52] Shaftesbury, Op. Cit., p 223

seriousness that avoided vanity, but was distinguished from the self-abasement that was humility. Modest people were not unambitious and would be tenacious in carrying out their great plans. Modest people were steady but not timid, nor presumptuous, they were genuine and refined, but not innocent or coy.[53]

Other writers mentioned virtues they thought important without offering any sort of explanation or evaluation. For instance, d'Holbach stated that 'above all, let him be fully persuaded that it is of the utmost importance to the inhabitants of this world to be JUST, KIND, and PEACEABLE.'[54] Berkeley briefly mentioned justice, chastity and loyalty as moral virtues.[55] Hume also addressed national allegiance in his section on artificial virtue, but I could get no sense of this as a virtue as such.

Moderation and modesty were very pleasant and attractive qualities and some sort of justice and honest promise giving was necessary for any human society to function, but did these virtues – other than greatness of mind – have anything to do with the flourishing of eighteenth century society and communities? This was a period of rising education, rising affluence and influence of the middle classes, along with and associated with the beginnings of significant advances in technology and industrialisation. These cultural and political developments might well be connected with the sorts of ambition and tenacious carrying out of grand plans that Hume and Wollstonecraft's virtues referred to. However, the strident voices of thinkers like Mandeville make it difficult to argue that such virtues were not entirely a matter of individual flourishing.

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[53] Wollstonecraft, Op. Cit., p 236-238
[54] D'Holbach, Op. Cit., Vol. 1, Preface p x
[55] Monro, Op. Cit., p 221

Jane Austen's six novels provide another source of information about eighteenth century virtues where we find an Aristotelian moral vision that does not seem to fit neatly with the Enlightenment debate.[56] Austen's Aristotelianism[57] can be readily observed from: her treatment of virtue as a process rather than an event; her praise of intelligence, understanding and self-control; her preference for not blindly following rules; the importance she places on friendship and community; and from the ease with which one can find examples of all Aristotle's virtues and all his vices of excess and deficit. This sort of moral vision was quite a contrast to the Enlightenment's vehemently anti-Aristotle and 'scientific' perspectives on morality. But we must remember that her father was teaching the classical education syllabus - devised by More and Erasmus two hundred or so years earlier - to her brothers and paying-students in the next room. Furthermore, he and many of the men in Austen's social and family circle had been educated at Oxford where Enlightenment thinking had not penetrated. Austen's family and friends read widely and they may have been read and discussed Enlightenment ideas – there is no clear evidence in her novels or letters. Nevertheless, the enormous popularity of her work suggests that that the blend of Stoic endurance, Aristotelian flexibility and Platonic idealism designed to suit the needs of Tudor society, was still the bedrock of morality for the educated classes. Significant for the purposes of this thesis is that Austen's moral code was specific to the home and social domain of middle class women. Her stories never ventured into the domains of politics or public administration, industry, estate management or finance, or even the workings of the Church and the Navy, that employed or

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[56] The following is a brief overview of the detailed analysis of virtue in Jane Austen's work that I carried out in 2002 for my Honours Thesis, entitled 'Jane Austen's Moral Vision: Variations on an Aristotelian Theme'. It also refers to material from a paper that I currently have in progress, with the working title of 'Solving the mystery of Jane Austen's Aristotelianism'.

provided incomes for the fathers and lovers of Austen's protagonists. Jane Austen's Aristotelian virtues of good humour, self-control, generosity, proper pride, courage, friendliness and good taste were necessary to the flourishing of individuals within their domestic domain, but they were not noticeably connected to the flourishing of the wider community or society as a whole.

The significance of public recognition and motivation for virtue

In line with their numerous ideas about the nature of virtue, eighteenth century thinkers identified an astonishing range of (often inconsistent) ideas about what motivated virtue, and indeed, what motivated the absence of virtue. Shaftesbury and many of the *encyclopédistes* - such as Voltaire - held that people (like themselves) who had aristocratic tastes, education and manners were motivated to be virtuous purely out of their admiration for the good. However, they saw themselves as a class apart from the majority, the common people or *le vulgaire*, who needed laws - together with the threat of Hell and promise of Heaven - in order to govern their behaviour.[58] Shaftesbury also claimed that virtuous people were conscious of the pleasure and delights arising from good in their own lives and in the lives of others. This sympathetic pleasure together with the love and esteem from others that came from and was earned by virtue, would be considerable and rewarding.[59]

Diderot and d'Holbach viewed self-esteem – from observing one's actions with pleasure – as the 'inestimable' reward of virtue and were convinced that even someone not 'naturally inclined to love it' would be able to see this reward and be

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[57] For an overview of Austen's Aristotelianism and Platonism see Gallop David, 'Jane Austen and the Aristotelian Ethic' in *Philosophy and Literature*, Vol.: 23.1 (1999), pp. 96-109
[58] Schlegal Dorothy B., *Shaftesbury and the French Deists*, (Chapel Hill, N. C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1956), pp 39-40
[59] Shaftesbury, Op. Cit., pp 193-196

motivated by it.[60] Diderot and d'Holbach also considered the motivation from shame, working in conjunction with self-esteem, self-respect and self-love. The disapproval of others would be a deterrent for anyone - the wicked would be ashamed and unhappy and the virtuous would be deterred from any wrong action 'just as the person who has acquired the habit of cleanliness hates getting dirty'.[61] On the other hand, *mutual* esteem – the 'amicable society' of people who valued and admired virtue in others and were valued and admired by others for their own virtue was suggested as the motivation for virtue by St. Andrews theologian Archibald Campbell.[62]

The Lisbon Earthquake and the Seven Years War shook many people's confidence in a benevolent but judgmental God. Nevertheless, many people continued to hold the view that God and his rewards and punishments were the motivations for virtue – at least for others if not themselves. Indeed, Voltaire argued that the moral order of society was at risk if there were no belief in a punitive God who would reward virtue and punish sin, and 'If God did not exist, he would have to be invented.'[63]

Yet another possibility was that human nature was the motivation for virtue. D'Holbach suggested that people were aware of their moral duties - from their experience and reason - and that these duties were necessary to preserve the relations between people. People were compelled by these duties because without them, they would not achieve their *natural* end. This natural end of a person was to 'render the beings with whom he lives happy' and 'contribute to his own

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[60] Jimack, Op. Cit., p 259
[61] Jimack, Op. Cit., p 259
[62] Stewart, Op. Cit., p 280
[63] Voltaire [10.16], 10;403 quoted in Jimack, Op. Cit., p 256

individual happiness'.[64]   We should note that it was not the happiness of others generally that was important, but the happiness of people with whom the moral agent lived. The perspective of the individual was paramount.

Consideration was also given to factors that would disincline people to virtue. Shaftesbury was concerned that fear of death might cause people to ignore certain earthly virtues in favour of those that would achieve salvation in the next life. D'Holbach was concerned that too much emphasis on life after death would result in indifference or torpor towards one's present flourishing.   Both were concerned with religious 'enthusiasm' – what we might call fundamentalism or claiming to reveal God's intentions or opinions – as it caused religious and international wars.[65]   Finally, Joseph de Maistre, in complete opposition to mainstream Enlightenment thinking, argued that: 'the desire to immolate oneself, to suffer, to prostrate oneself before authority, indeed before superior power, no matter whence it comes, and the desire to dominate, to exert authority, to pursue power for its own sake' were at least as powerful as the desire for virtue.[66]

This unprecedented range of competing and somewhat incompatible motivations for virtue, together with strong motivations against virtue, reflected both the crisis that Enlightenment thinkers were engaged in battling, together with their own preference for sceptical, scientific analysis of all the possibilities. The individual moral agent was presented with unprecedented options from which to choose. He or she was faced with options about what motivated virtue and about what discouraged virtue, about the nature of virtue and the nature of being human and about what behaviours were virtues and in what context they were good.   All

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[64] D'Holbach, Op. Cit., Vol. 1, pp 150-151
[65] Schlegal, Op. Cit., p 86

these options meant that eighteenth century individuals were forced into making choices about what virtue meant to themselves and why they would be virtuous – if at all. Individual choice, I suggest – and this notion will be examined in the final chapter - was both a cause and an effect of the decline of virtue. What had made virtue compelling in the past was the exclusive, reciprocal relationship between virtue, individual flourishing and societal flourishing, and by the end of the Eighteenth Century, this relationship seems to have largely disintegrated.

However, there was another, perhaps even more significant development in the Eighteenth Century that shifted individual and communal well-being even further – if that's possible – from the domain of virtue. Between 1779 and 1790 a series of six books by the German author J. P. Frank set about detailing the administrative and bureaucratic responsibilities of the State for fostering the health, well-being and indeed the happiness of individuals.[67]   These responsibilities were to be carried out by the 'Police' – a public sector organisation whose bailiwick (unlike today's Police) encompassed almost all government functions except the courts, the army and tax collection. Care for the self, which had traditionally incorporated care of others and care for the city, had become – in the eighteenth century model of the State in France and Germany – the responsibility, indeed the duty of governments.   Foucault traces this development from an early seventeenth century utopian work by Louis Turquet de Mayenne, which asserted that people's lives, behaviours, activities, productivity and happiness were the 'true object' of the 'Police'.[68] Throughout the Eighteenth

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[66] Berlin Isaiah, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*, Henry Hardy Ed., (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), p 167
[67] Foucault Michel, 'The Political Technologies of the Individual' in *Technologies of the Self: A seminar with Michel Foucault*, Eds. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick H. Hutton, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), pp 153-157
[68] Foucault (1988), Op. Cit., p 156

Century, treatises and manuals were published and implemented by French and German 'Police' administrators. These manuals detailed the interventions that were to be made in the domains of religion, morals, health, supplies, roads, highways and town buildings, public safety, liberal arts (arts and sciences), trade, factories, servants and factory workers, and the poor. This hierarchy of priorities was consistent within the various manuals that were produced.[69] The 'Police' were to see to 'everything pertaining to men's happiness'.

> The police deal with religion, not, of course, from the point of view of dogmatic orthodoxy but from the point of view of the moral quality of life. In seeing to death and supplies, the police deal with the preservation of life. Concerning trade, factories, workers, the poor, and public order, the police deal with the conveniences of life. In seeing to the theatre, literature, and entertainment, their object is life's pleasure. In short, life is the object of the police. The indispensable, the useful and the superfluous. Those are the three types of things that we need, or that we can use in our lives. That people survive, that people live, that people do even better than just survive or live: That is exactly what the police have to ensure.[70]

In this modern sort of world, the practice of virtue, the individual striving to achieve a human or divine ideal, virtue as the means to human happiness and flourishing, virtue as the means to societal and communal flourishing was apparently becoming something of a redundancy.

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[69] Ibid.
[70] Foucault (1988), Op. Cit., p 157

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CONCLUSIONS

In the course of this thesis, I have argued that for more than two thousand years the practice of virtue enabled the flourishing of communities and societies. Undoubtedly, virtue was a transformational process that enabled the individual to achieve certain highly desirable ends – such as glory, honour, happiness, flourishing, pleasure and eternal life. As well as caring for the self, virtue cultivated the care of others – stimulating responsibility for family, friends and community and promoting their well-being. However, virtue also transformed individuals into the sorts of people that societies and communities needed to survive or flourish in the face of the social, cultural and political circumstances of the time – and when communities flourished, so did individuals. Virtue was a way of life that transformed individuals into exactly the sort(s) of person that was needed for society to flourish – hero, politician, Christian witness, monk, prince, and so on. Virtues often correlated to the leadership skills that were pertinent to cultural, social and political circumstances. On the other hand, societies - furnished with people disposed to virtue – were able to provide safety and security, social order and control, crisis management strategies and occasionally even glory. We do not need to view this dual relationship – virtue and individual flourishing, virtue and societal flourishing – as mutually exclusive.[1] Rather, the history of virtue shows that there have been various kinds of individuality and communality espoused by humans and various ways virtues have enabled and supported societal flourishing. Virtue was the way for humans to live in society

and this way of living had profound, mutual benefits for that society and for its individuals. This inextricable interrelationship existed from the earliest times of Western civilisation until some point between the beginning of the Renaissance and the end of the Eighteenth Century.

The history of virtue from Homer to the Enlightenment offers evidence in support of my claim that virtues were not merely a cultural or social fashion that randomly or accidentally varied from time to time and place to place. Rather, that for at least two millennia, virtues were imperative to both individual and communal flourishing. During the four hundred years from the Renaissance to the end of the Eighteenth Century this profound and necessary relationship gradually deteriorated, leaving only traces - found in arguments about what virtue *should* do and be - that implied it was no longer occurring. Over these first four centuries or so of modernity, virtue gradually ceased to be the only way of successfully living in a social group and became merely one option among many that individuals can choose.

The apparent breakdown of the relationship between virtue and societal flourishing raises several questions that will be explored in this final chapter. What caused or enabled the two thousand-year cohesion between virtue and societal flourishing? What caused or enabled the cohesion to deteriorate? Does the relationship exist today in any form, and what questions, problems or solutions does its presence or absence present for contemporary virtue theory and practice?

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[1] Rajchman John, *Truth and Eros: Foucault, Lacan and the Question of Ethics*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), p 100

The historical cohesion between virtue, individual flourishing and societal flourishing

There were probably many factors that contributed to the existence of the relationship between virtue and societal flourishing; however I have identified four that I suggest would have been sufficient. These are: anthropology and biology – that humans are and always have been social animals; identity – that until the beginnings of Renaissance individualism, humans had always identified themselves in terms of their community and their role in that community; the qualities of the relationship itself – that it was flexible, adaptive, unquestioned and so on; and finally the environment in which the relationship existed.

Neo-Darwinists now seem generally agreed that 'Exclusive dog-eat-dog, tooth-and-claw competition, rather than cooperation, is probably not the way of natural selection.'[2] Co-operation, together with a desire for social cohesion and inclusion in the community are basic drives for certain social animals, including humans.[3] We could certainly see a blend of co-operation and competition in the Homeric virtues of hospitality and kindness to strangers, along with fighting skills and cunning. In Athens, there was co-operation in temperance, justice and friendship; and competition in ambition, magnificence and proper pride. The early Christians co-operated in almsgiving, hospitality and obedience; and competed in obscure ways with humility – not everyone can sit at the lowest seat – and with courage and the intense determination of some people to be martyrs. However, it is also argued that the inclination to virtue that humans have widely displayed is not proven 'by parallels in the animal kingdom, but by the very lack of convincing parallels.' Instead, it is the unique 'human obsession' with virtue

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[2] Klein Sherwin, 'The Natural Roots of Capitalism and Its Virtues and Values' in *Journal of Business Ethics*. Jl II 03; 45(4): 387-401, p 8

that needs explaining.[4] What was it about virtue that was so beneficial to humans

it could be an obsession? For a million years or so humans have organised their

societies, communities and social groups along the lines of a division of labour.[5]

Humans have always been dependent on each other and they manage this

dependence by conscious or unconscious reciprocity. Reciprocity – and we

remember this was central to Homeric virtue and evident in one form or another

within virtue through to the Renaissance – produces long term benefits and is

possible because humans, unlike other sorts of social animals, have stable

relationships and good memories.[6] Furthermore, division of labour is necessary

because people have unequal intellectual and physical skills and capabilities.

D'Holbach argues 'it is the variation of his faculties, the inequality which this

places him in, with regard to his fellows, that renders morals necessary to

man...'.[7] Humans may well carry out this division of labour with more intention

and mindfulness than say ants; however there has never been a human society that

has chosen not to practice division of labour. This suggests that the practice is

either innate or is the only feasible strategy given human needs and limitations.

Nevertheless, I would suggest that being social animals - organising our societies

according to the concepts of reciprocity and division of labour - was only one of

the factors that contributed to this cohesion between virtues and societal

flourishing.

'We come into a world that is already organised; we are creatures of

organization; we live in each other's lives; we understand ourselves through our

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[3] Ibid.
[4] Ridley Matt, *The Origins of Virtue*, (London: Penguin Group, 1996), pp 38-39
[5] Ridley, Op. Cit., p 6
[6] Klein, Op. Cit., p 8
[7] D'Holbach, Op. Cit., Vol. 1, p 134

reflection in the perception of others; we die in the lives of others.'[8]   In other words, humans are social beings that comprehend and go about their lives within the framework of relationship.   However, people in the past perceived their identities somewhat differently from people in modern individualistic societies. Up until the beginning of the Sixteenth Century, people identified themselves consistently in terms of their clan and their community.[9]   They understood that they were separate individuals, but what mattered most was the relationship they each had with their community, and their association with the identity and well-being of the community itself.   In ancient times, to live outside the community was to be outcast and experiencing a living death[10]; and by the Middle Ages it was to be possessed, mad or dangerous.[11]   The community defined the boundaries of a familiar world where the individual knew everyone; where work, leisure and home life were inseparable; and where the communal rituals and values that organised everyday life were defined.[12]   MacIntyre suggests that 'moral rules are first formulated in order to define the duties of people who assume roles in the social order, such as king or warrior or shepherd.'[13]   However we can see from the Homeric poems that early moral rules were not systematically defined at all and people certainly did not wait until they devised the concept of moral rules before having expectations about the roles of kings and shepherds.   I would argue it is more likely that virtues and social roles developed hand in hand and were never separated – until perhaps the last few centuries - from the needs of the community.

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[8] Pincoffs E., *Quandaries & Virtues*, (Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1986), p 7
[9] Revel *et al*, Op. Cit., p 325
[10] Pearson, Op. Cit., p 48
[11] Duby and Braunstein, Op. Cit., p 510

The third factor that enabled the relationship between virtue and societal flourishing to persist was that it was flexible and adaptive. Tradition and traditional virtues were never sacrosanct. As we saw in the history, they could always be reinterpreted (such as wisdom), mis-remembered (such as courage) or simply left in abeyance (such as hospitality) until they were necessary again. The priority – or place in the hierarchy – of particular virtues could shift depending on, for example, whether courage, wisdom or love was most likely to lead to communal success. The relationship was also adaptive in the sense that individuals and societies both contributed to, complied with and benefited from meeting needs, providing laws, setting standards of behaviour and requiring enough conformity to ensure social order, stability, survival and sometimes great fame. The content of particular virtues – especially courage, wisdom, temperance, friendship and justice – was also flexible and adaptive, keeping step with the circumstances and needs of the time. The relationship between virtue and flourishing was never expected to be simple or perfect. No one ever expected or sought a single virtue or a single moral rule to serve all moral questions – at least not until the Seventeenth Century. People did not question the fact that some moral problems could only be solved by sacrificing one virtue in favour of another. Virtues simply were not judged according to whether or not they eliminated or avoided all conflict – this expectation did not occur until modern times. Indeed, for the ancient Greeks, conflict was considered necessary if love, beauty and harmony were to be experienced at all. Whereas for Christians the very notion of virtue presupposed the existence of sin that must be battled

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[12] Ariès Philippe, 'Introduction' in *A History of Private Life, Volume 3, Passions of the Renaissance*, Roger Chartier Ed., Arthur Goldhammer Trans., (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), pp 1-2
[13] Wong, Op. Cit., p 53

continuously. Furthermore, until the Renaissance, people had only a limited knowledge and understanding about the virtues and moral standards that were practised in other times and places - and we could reasonably assume that people are far less likely to question the validity of their way of life if it is the only one they know.

The final factor that enabled virtue and societal flourishing to cohere was the cultural environment itself. In each historical era until the Renaissance, people shared a common, basic education that instilled the values of their community. Public opinion within their community promoted and encouraged consistent ideals – human or divine as the case may be. The most respected people in the community – heroes, sages, monks or princes – practised and epitomised these same virtues. Although the notions of what it meant to be human changed from time to time, they were persistently associated with virtue and with the general approach to achieving success or flourishing for a community. Virtues were what individuals wanted to have - because they brought praise, respect, esteem, honour and sometimes wealth. Virtues catered for the needs of the community, and it was taken for granted that when the needs of the community were satisfied, individuals thrived as well.

The gradual breakdown of the cohesion between virtue and societal flourishing

The causes of the deterioration of the relationship between virtue and communal flourishing are many and complex. Four causes stand out particularly: the Renaissance revolt against virtue – and indeed all traditional systems – as a way of life; the rise of individualism and commitment to the notion that people are entitled to choose the virtues and values that best suit their own needs, temperaments and interests; the rise of science and scepticism, which threw doubt

on the validity and reality of virtue; and the rise of the modern State – with its assumption of responsibility for ensuring individual happiness and its legislation for a level of behavioural conformity designed to ensure social stability and order. There are also a variety of other, probably less significant causes: the demise of the seriousness and sacredness of virtue; the tension between passive morality and active virtue; the loss of universal, univocal values; and the loss through translation of ancient Greek word associations.

As we saw in Chapter 8, Renaissance people deliberately set out to disassemble and reject the systems, values and beliefs associated with virtue, largely because these were seen as traditional, systematic and bound up with the authority of the Church. It was suddenly possible for many more people to read and ponder the alternatives offered in ancient texts. We also saw that virtue came to be understood as something occasional, like fighting tigers - not an everyday matter. Other behaviours, like good manners and civility were perceived as more relevant to everyday living and the maintenance of polite social relations.

Commencing in the Renaissance there were new notions of: being true to oneself, realising one's personal potential, setting moral standards and goals depending on one's temperament, preferences and personal moral vision – and a strong preference for independence over obedience. With individualism, the only moral failing was not to serve one's inner vision. Obeying, worshipping, respecting or imitating a sage figure of some kind – human or divine – was abandoned in favour of a new idea of the self as creating and shaping its own world.[14] This creative individualistic notion of the self also involved the repudiation, discrediting and denouncing of the traditional communal surveillance

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[14] Berlin, Op. Cit., pp 189-190

of behaviour and virtue. Such surveillance came to be viewed as an intolerable invasion of the individual's right to choose, to create his or her own values and of 'what came to be known as privacy, the private sphere being that which was not subject to the jurisdiction of the community'.[15] The commitment to independence, privacy and choice was supplemented by the notion that each person 'carried the sources of knowledge in himself; either in his power of sense perception... or in his power of intellectual intuition'.[16] The idea that each individual had the intellectual capacity to answer the big moral questions for themselves endured from Descartes and Bacon to until about the middle of the Eighteenth Century.[17] This confidence then disappeared - probably not because people no longer had the confidence or capacity, nor because the moral dilemmas became more difficult, but because the shared communal value system that long underpinned the individual's answers to moral questions had fallen away. Finally, individualism meant that people could choose what would make them happy from a wide range of options. Socrates had said with great and long-lasting authority:

> I did not care for the things most people care about – making money, having a comfortable home, high military or civil rank, and all the other activities, political appointments, secret societies, party organization, which go on in our city... I tried to persuade each one of you to *concern himself less with what he has than with what he is*, so as to render himself as excellent and rational as possible.[18]

However, with individualism came a decline in the influence of all such authorities, as well as the loss of any powerful communal prohibition on deciding that *having* these things would make one happy.

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[15] Chartier Roger, 'Introduction: Community, State and Family: Trajectories and Tensions' in *A History of Private Life, Volume 3, Passions of the Renaissance*, Roger Chartier Ed., Arthur Goldhammer Trans., (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), pp 400-401

[16] Norton, Op. Cit., p 11

[17] Berlin, Op. Cit., pp 180-182

In the history of seventeenth and eighteenth century virtue we saw how the escalation of scepticism that began in the Renaissance and the commitment to science that began in the Seventeenth Century fed on each other and together discredited virtue and the virtues as human or divine ideals. Indeed, the fact that these concepts were ideals and thus not measurable or subject to some kind of mathematical structure helped the discreditation process. Science and scepticism also disproved the ancient notion of a human *telos* and at a stroke invalidated the long held belief that the human purpose was earthly or heavenly happiness achieved through the practice of virtue. Indeed, as Berlin argues, by the mid Eighteenth Century people were no longer confident that the big questions – How should I live? What will make me happy? – could be answered at all.[19] Almost certainly, they could not be answered with virtue, because virtue was no longer assuredly objective and real.

We saw in the history of eighteenth century virtue that new ideas about State responsibility for individual happiness were being implemented in Germany and France. The rise of the modern State began during the Renaissance and had a variety of impacts on the relationship between virtue and societal flourishing. The State was intended to establish social peace[20] - an achievement expected of virtue since at least the time of Aristotle. The State was intended to strengthen and regulate the bonds between individuals[21] - another old expectation of virtue.[22] The rise of the new State – in conjunction with the loss of 'one Church' at the

[18] Plato, *The Apology*, quoted in Hadot Pierre, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, Ed. Arnold I. Davidson, Trans. Michael Chase, (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1995), p 90
[19] Berlin, Op. Cit., pp 180-182
[20] Yves Castan *et al*, Op. Cit., p 16
[21] Ibid.
[22] Western governments have continued to take responsibility for peace, the regulation of human relationships and the provision of human happiness, which they understand to derive from ever increasing economic and material wealth.

time of the Reformation – also 'broke the spell of one world, one universal law, and consequently one universal goal for all men everywhere, at all times'.[23] Furthermore, this equivocation about virtue, moral laws and the source of human happiness raised the problem of relativism, and in turn added to the loss of faith in the reality of communal values and virtues.

Then there were a number of lesser factors. That virtue had – by the end of the Eighteenth Century – become largely a matter of pleasure and sentiment rather than the serious, authoritative, sacred ideal it had been in the past could only diminish its influence and value. Equally diminishing for the cultural value of virtue was that for many Lutheran and Calvinist Protestants morality had become a passive and unreasoning faith, rather than an active struggle to learn, practice, habituate and exemplify virtues. Finally, there was the matter of translations. In Chapter 4 we saw that for the ancient Greeks, the notions of virtue, moral disposition and the place where people lived well – *êthiké, ethos* and *êthos* – all had an etymological connection. Every time these words were spoken, the connection between virtue and society was clear. However, with translations of these concepts into Latin and subsequently the modern European languages, this connection between the concepts inevitably became less distinct.

Now if these are the causes of the original relationship and the triggers for its break down, some significant questions arise for virtue in the present day. For instance, are virtues the behaviours that enable twenty-first century, Western society to flourish? How are virtues commonly portrayed in our society and can people learn to be virtuous – would they want to be virtuous – given the way virtue is publicly perceived and promoted? We could perhaps argue that the

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[23] Berlin, Op. Cit., p 32

relationship is of a primordial nature – that it reflects the very beginnings of virtue

(and perhaps society) from which some other kind of virtue or relationship

between virtue and societal flourishing has developed. Without ruling this out, we

might also argue that the relationship that can be found in the history of virtue

continues to exist, perhaps in a different way, or perhaps merely very deeply

hidden. As a way of throwing light on the present day status of the relationship

between virtue and societal flourishing, let us consider each of the four historical

themes in terms of present day practice and theory of virtue.

The association between the style of virtue and the stability of society

Contemporary virtue theory regards virtue as a matter of the character of an

individual moral agent – an entity that defines or chooses his or her own values,

virtues and motivations. Contemporary virtue theory often (though not always)

starts from the model of virtue found in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and

avoids or overlooks the social, cultural and political implications of virtue, as well

as the social group behaviours that he describes elsewhere. A number of

philosophers have argued that there is no such thing as an individual moral agent

separated from relationships, social values and social institutions[24] – casting doubt

on the validity of any theories based on such a model. Contemporary virtue

theory then, appears theoretically weak when it fails to take into account the

reciprocal influences between virtue and social, cultural and political

circumstances, social stability, and societal flourishing. One potential explanation

for the exclusively individual focus of contemporary virtue theory is that the

individual is no longer understood to be responsible for making independent

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[24] See for instance, Dewey John, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1957), pp 169-172, or Pincoffs, Op. Cit., pp 7-8

contributions to social stability. Another explanation is that social institutions such as police, courts, defence forces and various sorts of legislation achieve the necessary level of behavioural conformity to maintain social stability.

A number of twentieth century critiques of modernity offer potential explanations for this shift in responsibility from the individual to governments or social institutions. One would be Heidegger's famous critique of modernity contained in 'The Question Concerning Technology'[25] that represents the essence of technology as a ubiquitous enframing that transforms all aspects of the world into resource or standing reserve. All-encompassing control – including, perhaps, social control and order - is attempted through the bringing together of all things in the single frame of 'available resource'. In this view, there would be no requirement for individual contribution to societal flourishing or social order – any human desires and activities would be limited and constrained by the gathering together and ordering that is the character of technology.

A more direct explanation for the devolution of responsibility for societal flourishing from individuals to the State or institutional can be derived from Foucault's critique of modernity contained in the essay entitled 'Governmentality'[26]. In this view, all-encompassing social control is achieved through the drive for economic efficiency that is fundamental to modern bureaucratic and legal structures. Economic efficiency is the context, objective and justification for public policy and decision making. Whereas the controlling character of technology is obscured by the presentation of technology as 'a mere

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[25] Heidegger (1993), Op. Cit., pp 311-341
[26] Foucault (1991a), Op. Cit.

servant of human needs and desires'[27], economic efficiency is the proud centrepiece of organisational strategic plans. It is diligently applied to almost all types of governmental activities from arts grants to decisions about hospital beds and education funding.[28] From this perspective, it would be governmentality and control through economic efficiency that delivers social ordering and control.

On the other hand, it might not be necessary for some kind of activity, principle or system – such as the enframing of technology or the governmentality of public institutions - to render superfluous the contribution of individuals to societal flourishing. Instead, it might be simply a matter of defining individuals out of the equation. Foucault discusses the rising concern with government through the Sixteenth, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries. This concern progresses from the notion that 'there are three fundamental types of government... the art of self-government, connected with morality; the art of properly governing a family, which belongs to economy; and finally the science of ruling the state, which concerns politics.'[29] By this definition, the individual and virtue have no part to play in the orderly management and stability of the state and society. In the Eighteenth Century, thinking about government develops into the notion that:

> To govern a state will ... mean to apply economy, to set up an economy at the level of the entire state, which means exercising towards its inhabitants, and the wealth and behaviour of each and all, a form of surveillance and control as attentive as that of the head of a family over his household and his goods.[30]

[27] Malpas Jeff and Wickham Gary, 'Governance and the World: From Joe Dimaggio to Michel Foucault' in *UTS Review*, Vol. 3, 1997: 91-108, p 102
[28] Malpas and Wickham, Op. Cit., p 103
[29] Foucault (1991a), Op. Cit., p 91
[30] Foucault (1991a), Op. Cit., p 92

Indeed, by the Eighteenth Century, good government is synonymous with economic government[31] and it involves a complex economic management of territory, things and people. Government now provides the surveillance and control that the communal system of virtue had previously entailed.

Notwithstanding Western society's commitment to individualism, governments are in the business of controlling populations, not individuals. The purpose of governments is to manage the welfare of the population and to improve its health and wealth. Governments stimulate birth rates; direct the geographic location of homes and work-places[32]; provide incentives for saving money, buying houses, working part-time, studying and learning skills; and a myriad of other interventions in the daily life of individuals – as mere elements of the population. Ironically, each of these interventions – carried out in the name of welfare and improvement – limit the individual's choices and control over their own flourishing. Governments, by regarding individuals as population, also reinforce the expectation that individuals cannot make a difference to the flourishing of their society. Moreover, the apparent redundancy of individual contribution to societal flourishing would seem to be supported by the way we understand society-wide or public matters of morality. Public morality is generally dealt with by legislation and (largely faceless) institutions such as Ombudsman offices and Ethics committees, and which typically form no part of contemporary virtue theory.

The public elucidation and promotion of virtue

One of the most prevalent contemporary perceptions about virtue is that it is relative to places and times and therefore any single set of virtues cannot be relied

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[31] Ibid.

on as objective or real.[33] Now, if we were looking for a set of virtues that would suit all times and all places, past, present and future, then this judgement would of course be correct. However, why would we want an ethics that paid no attention to the circumstances in which we live? Why would an ethics need to accommodate the needs of all times and places in order for it to be held with conviction? We can see from the history of virtue that changes in ideas and values associated with virtue and the virtues occurred for very good reasons. Yet modern scientific thinking has insisted that virtue has no reality unless it can be articulated as an all-inclusive law, which by definition would not address the particular social, cultural or political circumstances faced by people in actual societies.

Another prevalent modern perception – or at least expectation – is that virtue must be applicable to everyone. As we saw in the history of virtue, this idea that everyone in a society could or should practice virtue was a late medieval notion. In the Renaissance, it was sometimes claimed that civility and manners – rather than virtue as it had been practised in the past - were what society needed from 'everyone'. Hume and his Enlightenment colleagues rested their hopes for a moral law on universal benevolence – a virtue as middle/upper class as civility was in the Renaissance. I doubt that Hume would expect a poverty-stricken woman transported to the colonies for stealing bread to feed her children could practice benevolence. Likewise, the Italian humanists seeking universal civility were not concerned with the manners of peasants. The 'democratisation' of virtue up to the Eighteenth Century was still limited to those with influence and power

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[32] Foucault (1991a), Op. Cit., p 100

[33] Despite a variety of cogent arguments from some contemporary philosophers aimed at dispelling or modifying this perception, I regularly hear or read this view expressed in popular as well as philosophical contexts.

and I suggest that ambivalence about the universality of virtue persists today. On the one hand, the idea of virtue as the domain of an elite or associated with a minority characterised by prudishness or empty piety is anathema. On the other, virtue is not widely promoted as an aspiration for everyone.

Here we have two widely held dilemmas about virtue – its relativism and its universalism – that clearly make it difficult for the notion of virtue to have widespread public credibility. How can people know whether they should be thinking about, learning or practising virtue if its reality and relevance to themselves is unclear? Indeed, is it even rational to choose and esteem particular values and virtues? According to Weberian, Western capitalistic norms, the answer is 'no'.

> [Whereas] an agent may be more or less rational in acting consistently with his values, the choice of any one particular evaluative stance or commitment can be no more rational that that of any other. All faiths and all evaluations are equally non-rational; all are subjective directions given to sentiment and feeling.[34]

The individual with a desire for virtue is left standing at the edge of an abyss - facing the possibilities that to choose virtue is irrational; that virtue is an empty concept; and that virtue is an elitist, priggish or self-righteous mode of being.

Another issue for the public elucidation and promotion of virtue is the question of how the promotion of virtue happens, if it happens at all. As a general rule, Australian primary and secondary schools tend to avoid discussion about particular moral values and virtues that might be interpreted as moralising or discriminating against people who hold different views. This is a dilemma. When virtue was the way of life, people were not practising abstract concepts, they were practising particular virtues that were clearly defined and communicated. Yet, we have no very clear, widespread idea of what virtues are

now and who can and should practise them. Meanwhile, virtues are sometimes brandished – not unlike early Christian use of the virtue of hospitality - by politicians aiming to demonize people and values that are different from their own.[35] In addition, various particular virtues are frequently the subject or underlying theme of television programs and movies. However, if – as it is widely asserted – we do not learn to be murderous and aggressive from watching images of people killing and maiming each other, nor do we learn to be virtuous from watching images of courage and justice.

The pro-society quality of virtue

Before concluding the discussion, let us briefly examine the role of virtues such as courage, wisdom, friendship, self-control, good humour and justice in our society. These virtues persist in the sense that we value and admire them when they feature (as they regularly do) in the 'human interest' stories that pad out the nightly television news and are found in newspapers and popular magazines. They also feature in our public narratives, in books and particularly movies – when was the last time Hollywood produced a movie that was not about friendship, justice, good humour, self-control or courage? Justice – in the form of matters before and concerns with the institutionalised justice system - features heavily in the serious news and is of course the subject of much contemporary moral philosophy. However, the contribution of a just individual to the justice or otherwise of our society appears to be minute – if it happens at all. Likewise, the

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[34] MacIntyre (1984), Op. Cit., p 26
[35] For instance, the Australian Prime Minister John Howard centred an election campaign on diatribes against refugees who had 'thrown their children overboard'. It turned out (well after the election) that the people in question had been complying with a request from the Australian Navy to abandon a sinking ship.

courage, wisdom or friendship of individuals has little or no impact on the peace, concord, order, stability or glory of our society.[36]

So what does make our society flourish – in the particular way that it does – and what human behaviours, habits and dispositions contribute to this flourishing? These would seem to be 'virtues' or habituated dispositions associated with and conducive to the persistence of the doctrines that underpin the particular kind of flourishing of our society – such as the interconnected doctrines of consumerism, free market competition, entrepreneurism and economic rationalism. For instance, consumerism persists because people are habituated to shopping and choosing disposable products rather than reusing, repairing and recycling, and because we are habituated to the notion that well-being involves continually acquiring new and better material goods. The free market approach persists because people are habituated to purchasing products that are manufactured by impoverished third-world factory workers, who are paid a fraction of what we would demand for the same work. Or perhaps because people are disposed to sanctioning the importation of foods from other countries, while our own farmers send the same sorts of foods to other countries – thus generating wealth from inefficiency – as is common throughout the capitalist West. Admiration and respect for entrepreneurial skills – the ability to discover and exploit markets, raw materials and human effort in order to make ever-increasing monitory profit appears ubiquitous and unquestioned. From a Weberian point of view, the pervasive spirit of Western capitalism gives rise to the 'leading principle' that 'Man is dominated by the making of money, by acquisition as the

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[36] Even a million citizens walking the streets of Australian cities to protest our Government's decision to invade Iraq were unable to influence the peacefulness of our society.

ultimate purpose of his life.'[37] Here we have a contemporary *telos* for human life — acquisition — directly associated with a virtue of making money, in particular, making profit. Economic rationalism persists because people are habituated to measuring the value of all goods, services and human activities in terms of their monetary value. Weber explains that indeed modern Western rationality has its genesis from 'recognising the fundamental importance of the economic factor, above all [taking] account of economic conditions.'[38] So not only is good government a matter of economic government, but rationality is a matter of economic rationality. Our habituation to 'virtues' associated with consumerism, free market competition, entrepreneurism and economic rationalism seem to be what enables our society to flourish. Using language that resonates with the way we speak of virtue, Weber writes:

> The capitalistic economy of the present day is an immense cosmos into which the individual is born, and which presents to him, at least as an individual, as an unalterable order of things in which he must live.[39]

However, unlike virtue as the way of life, the individual in a capitalistic way of life is 'force[d] to conform to the capitalistic rules of action'[40]. We seem to have no choice but to measure the well-being and success of our society and individuals by a steadily increasing economic growth, wealth and the acquisition of houses and cars or sophisticated military weapons and equipment.

The significance of public recognition and motivation for virtue

Much has been written in the last few hundred years about the motivation for virtue — far more I would estimate than in the entire previous two millennia. There was probably less need to analyse or promote motivations when virtue was the

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[37] Weber Max, *Max Weber on Capitalism, Bureaucracy and Religion: A Selection o Texts*, Stanislav Andreski Ed., (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), p 114
[38] Weber, Op. Cit., p 29

only way of life and the motivation for virtue was therefore self-evident. In parallel with the centring of virtue theory on the individual character, modern motivations for virtue have also centred on the individual. These include motivations such as: a personal love of virtue itself; a personal relationship with God; love, sympathy or empathy for others; or a love for values or principles themselves. The implication is that there are no longer any communal motivations - raising the question of whether indeed there is any common life in present day Western society.

Mill asserts that 'Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.'[41] This plays out as individual freedom of conscience, thoughts, feelings, opinions, sentiments, tastes and pursuits, life plans and freedom to unite 'for any purpose not involving harm to others'.[42] So is it possible to have a common life that incorporates indeed demands such individual freedom to create oneself? Anecdotally, I would be inclined to say no. People frequently lament the loss of a sense of community in our contemporary big-city oriented society. Social alienation is evident in widespread vandalism, drug abuse, depression, road rage and so on. For many people, the only common life is the one they view on television and of course they do not actually participate in that life, but merely observe it passively. When people do try to participate in a common objective – such as protesting Australian involvement in the Iraq invasion, or protesting the logging of ancient Tasmanian forests – they are ignored, abused and trivialised by opinion makers, that is by the media and by leaders of our liberal democratic governments.

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[39] Weber, Op. Cit., p 115
[40] Ibid.

While individualism insists that people can – if they wish - find goodness in a lifestyle that supports capitalism, consumerism and economic rationalism, there are, of course, people who choose to live according to different values. There are people who form their own small communities - which may or may not correspond to a particular geographical place - and who endure or stand at a distance from the values of society at large.[43] We could perhaps define virtues that are associated with and conducive to the sort of community that promotes care for the environment, peace and disarmament, or a simpler, more self-sufficient way of living. Or virtues that enable the flourishing of communities who value and practice art, crafts, music, growing organic vegetables, skateboarding, or ideologies such as Buddhism. These and other focal activities enable people to share, promote, and live in ways that allow them to participate in, contribute to and benefit from community. 'What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained...'.[44] The people who create and maintain these sorts of communities may be the inheritors of our long virtue tradition. 'It is sometimes said that we today live among different ethical traditions without being able to say any longer why we should adopt them or how to choose among them.'[45] It is suggested that we must choose either *pluralism* and retain all the traditional values, or *monism* and devise a 'single correct

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[41] Mill John Stuart, *On Liberty and Utilitarianism*, (London: David Campbell Publishers Ltd., 1992), p 13

[42] Mill, Op. Cit., p 15

[43] This approach bears a striking resemblance to the common life shared by Stoic and Epicurean communities within (yet alienated from) the Roman Empire. However, I would hesitate to recommend the Hellenistic models of virtue as a basis for contemporary virtue theory because they were founded on the policy of some of Plato's successors of waiting for the world to get better; waiting for the world to become a place (as envisaged by Plato) where philosophers ruled. The Hellenistic model might be a starting point, but the time for waiting and hoping for a better world may have passed.

[44] MacIntyre (1984), Op. Cit., p 263

[45] Rajchman, Op. Cit., p 145

theory'.[46] However, the history of virtue shows that there are many catalogues of traditional virtues and that we have failed for centuries to devise that elusive all-purpose theory. Perhaps even more importantly, neither of these approaches leads us to critically examine those traditional virtues for their suitability in dealing with present day social, cultural and political circumstances and difficulties. In this scenario, twenty-first century excellences are not the virtues that enable capitalism, consumerism and economic rationalism to persist, nor are they the virtues that enabled past communities to flourish. Rather, our virtues are practices and excellences that enable people to create and sustain community and that enable individuals to make a difference to their own flourishing and that of their community. These practices – or some of them - are certainly the subject of attention from ethicists and ethical theorists. However, perhaps it is time we began widespread public promotion of them as virtues, to be practised in a quiet everyday manner by both individuals and communities.

This brings us to the final problem for contemporary virtue theory that I wish to highlight in this thesis: the problem of perceiving virtue as behaviour for special occasions only. This was a perception that began in the Renaissance with comparisons of virtue to occasional activities such as fighting tigers. It continues today with discussion of virtue as 'recollections and anticipations of great things and great events... bonds of continuity with past greatness.... the practiced and accomplished facility that makes one equal to a great event.'[47] Such thinking places virtue outside the realm of possible achievement for anyone except those who might be able to influence or participate in a great event. It places virtue outside the realm of everyday people, everyday living and everyday communal

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[46] Ibid.

flourishing. More significantly, the history of the virtues shows us that whereas *perfect* virtue – being a sage – may have been a matter of greatness, practising virtue for everyone else was a way of life. It was not a way of living that entailed waiting for something great to happen, but a way of everyday living that ensured that individual and societal flourishing happened. Fighting a battle was the Homeric hero's everyday life. Making just choices about public policy was everyday life for the Athenian citizen. Striving for self-control and courage in the face of plague and war was everyday life in the Middle Ages. The circumstances in history that people responded to with virtue may seem great and exceptional to us now, but that is only because today we face different circumstances and challenges.

Perhaps the relationship between virtue and societal or communal flourishing that we find in the examination of the history I have surveyed in this thesis will enable us to rethink our understanding of virtue in contemporary society. By expanding our focus - from patterns to be found in individual character, reasoning and emotions - to include patterns to be found in communal flourishing, a new understanding of virtue may develop. We might find that twenty-first century virtues are different from the virtues of our tradition – but so they should be. Our social, cultural, political and technological circumstances are rather different from those of our past – even our recent past.[48] We may even find that virtues are thriving (despite relativism and other problems), along with a way of living together in communities that can flourish within, yet detached from, prevailing Western norms.

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[47] Borgmann Albert, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p 224

After all, as social animals, we are relational and as such, we continue to create and sustain communities. History tells us that virtue and communal flourishing are intertwined. History provides hints that we will find our virtues - not in tradition, not in abstract moral agents and not in simple, universal laws - but in the examination of how contemporary people create and sustain flourishing communities.

> So that virtue, which of all the excellencies and beauties is the chief and most amiable, that which is the prop and ornament of human affairs, which upholds communities, maintains union, friendship and correspondence amongst men, that by which countries, as well as private families, flourish and are happy, and for want of which everything comely, conspicuous, great and worthy must perish and go to ruin – that single quality, thus beneficial to all society and to mankind in general, is found equally a happiness and good to each creature in particular and is that by which alone man can be happy and without which he must be miserable.
>
> SHAFTESBURY[49]

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[48] For instance, we may find that by focusing on communal flourishing – relativistic as this may be – tolerance becomes an indispensable virtue. In a world that spends more money on weapons than almost any other single thing, tolerance may be the only defence communities have against attack.

[49] Shaftesbury, Op. Cit., p230

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