

4. “Another problem with people who fail to examine themselves is that they often prove all too easily influenced. When a talented demagogue addressed the Athenians with moving rhetoric but bad arguments, they were all too ready to be swayed, without ever examining the argument.” (Martha C. Nussbaum, *Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*)

People who fail to examine themselves prove to be all too easily influenced. Peculiar. The title I chose for this essay that is about to reveal itself possesses a contemporary dimension that concerns us immensely. Human beings have found ways of communication among ourselves, yet this communication proves to be lacklustre in many aspects of our daily being; political aspect perhaps stands out in relation to Nussbaum’s quote, because it considers the image of men embossed in the image of the society and their relation to the validity of political mechanisms. What I am interested in, however, is the manner in which we can solve this problem, how can we address the issue of self-examination (that can, if lacking, potentially lead to misguidance) in the social sense through genuine communication. My aim is to provide an account of human existence that results in a dialogical state and argue that the failure of examining ourselves stems from incomplete comprehension of our condition and the ethical dimension that is immanent to it. Hence, I will speak of the function of ethics in our development, namely I will address a certain shift happening from the Enlightenment to the postmodern period by illustrating how some of the objectivistic theories, namely Kantian Deontology, no longer suffice for our account of the human being. Later I will introduce Aristotelian Virtue ethics and finally, Martin Buber’s theory of dialogue through I-Thou relation and try to build a convincing case that paints the holistic image of men who successfully discover and assert themselves through the strength of their character and quality of their dialogue.

The narrative of a holistic human being that I am pursuing is vital, for only such a being can examine himself thoroughly and evade the misconceptions brought upon him by the means of insufficient education and inadequate communication. To actually unveil this holistic presentation, first and foremost, I will address the question of **what is our condition**. To begin with, the understanding of human nature during the Enlightenment period, namely theory of Kantian Deontology will be employed. The reason takes the leading role in our distinctive humanness, for Kant considers it to be what distinguishes us from animals; existence comes in different stages and reason is peculiar to ours. In order to have reason, freedom is necessitated, which results in our autonomous state – we are our own lawgivers, we can freely decide what our actions will be. Reason and freedom are then vital for our understanding of the ethical dimension

of our existence - Kantian ethics is concerned with the notion of duty and “ought,” Kantian narrative aims to create an impartial individual who rigorously admires the starry sky above him and the moral law within him, to somehow paraphrase Kant’s famous quotation. Morality as arguably the most important aspect of our lives is transcendental to our human flaws that manifest themselves through inclinations that for Kant represent fundamentally unstable and whimsical nature of emotions, desires, intuitions; therefore, moral code is a set of rigid principles that pride themselves on their impartiality, rationality and universalizability. All three are crucial if we want to achieve a precise approach to morality that is action-guiding and Kant goes on to explain how those characteristics are acquired through the Categorical Imperative, a nifty method with which we determine the moral value of our actions. More will be said in the following paragraphs but as of right now, I want to establish the crucial point upon which I will base my future reasoning. Such objectivist moral theories that have been able to single out a universal principle by which we shall design our conduct have left a tremendous footprint in our understanding of morality, however, they do not suffice. A brief explanation of Kantian ethics that I have just proposed serves as a certain template of morality, but as was explained in the introductory paragraphs, my aim is to identify our human condition and Kantian thought seems to be missing something. In this aspect, a compelling point was made by Williams, who proclaimed ethics and morality to be two differing terms. Morality is understood in this Kantian sense, referring to duty and moral conduct whereas ethics is a much wider concept that encompasses the entire human existence - our relations with each other, the tendency to strive for happiness and most importantly, our moral selfhood. To further elaborate this distinction - Elizabeth Anscombe offered, once again, a paradigmatically different comprehension of morality than that found in Kant, for example. In her work *Modern Moral Philosophy*, she claims that there is a shift necessary because theories that rely on artificial notions such as duty are no longer acknowledged and legitimized by us, because they do not offer a complete account of humanity. If we take the notion of friendship as an illustration of why Anscombe’s claim poses a highly compelling point - in Kantian ethics, the friendship itself is a problematic subject, because we cannot identify it as moral. Impartiality, that is crucial to Kantian reasoning, refuses the previously described inclinations that are necessary for us to be forming friendship, after all, if we consider someone a friend, we do so because of our emotional attachment to him - he gladly spends his time with us, he offers us support, makes us laugh with his peculiar sense of humour - all in all, we appreciate him because of his individuality, and such appreciation is not impartial - if it were, it wouldn’t matter to us if our lifelong friend Jarko would be suddenly replaced with a random acquaintance called Varko under the pretence of being our friend, towards which we would (in a Kantian fashion) feel the same

impartial amount of respect for his dignity as a person, but no affection for his humour or irritation with his quirks. It seems highly counter-intuitive that our only relation to the other is that of duty and friendship is in this sense very illustrative because we (I hope, at least) share the experience of past and present friendships that were not just manifestation of our sense of duty. Nonetheless, it might be true that Kantian Deontology offers precise, meticulous ways of finding the absolute morality, but the gap between the normative image of the man it creates and the concrete image we have of ourselves is unsettling.

In order to lessen this gap, Anscombe claims, we should return back to Aristotelian Virtue Ethics, because it comes a lot closer to our personal experience of being human and because it does not produce artificial procedural steps where we ask ourselves (here and there) if a certain action we want to perform is moral, but instead shapes us as a persons who act morally out of our own immutable character. Virtue ethics is concerned with our virtuous character and its acquisition, the constant reflection upon our actions and the potential improvements we could implement to live the best life possible, therefore it is agent and not action-based. When talking of Kantian ethics, we evaluate our actions, when speaking of classical utilitarianism, we evaluate the consequences of our actions, but when referring to virtue ethics, we evaluate our character. Aristotle, as perhaps the most prominent representative of Virtue ethics who is renowned for his work later on titled Niccomachean Ethics, where he speaks of the notion of *Eudaimonia*, roughly dubbed as happiness. Eudaimonia is the ultimate goal in our lives, it is essentially the harmony we feel within ourselves that was also described by Plato and his theory of the tripartite soul, where harmony represents the balance between reason, appetite and passion. This harmony is something we naturally tend to and it can be achieved through possession of the correct character traits, the virtues. Virtues are, according to Aristotle, a combination of natural, internal tendencies that can be either good or bad in this trivial understanding, and our nurturing of the traits we somehow find desirable. The element present in every virtue is the doctrine of the mean, claiming that there is a certain amount of a certain trait that can be considered virtuous, but that extremes are to be avoided. A textbook example would be courage - too much of it could be proclaimed recklessness and too little cowardice; up to this point, virtue ethics seem rather plausible indeed. However, the problem it is still encountering today is the question of how do we determine virtues, that are understood as excellence of character. Aristotle says that we seek out the examples of virtuous people in our environment - parents, teachers, peers etc. and take after them; we internalize those identified virtues and reassert them through consistently performing actions that correspond to, for example, kindness. If kindness is among our virtues,

we are expected to act kindly in an array of different situations, through our actions we stabilise and strengthen our character. All is well, but nonetheless, the question of how we recognize a virtuous person when we see it remains unanswered. Aristotle did compose a list of character traits he perceived as virtues, but throughout the time, there was dispute in their legitimacy as such. Aristotle proclaimed pride to be a virtue, but in Christianity, for example, pride is considered to be vanity in the face of god that should be replaced with humility. Some critics that perhaps the only answer to this question, setting a criterion for what a virtue is, is to be found in Cultural relativism, where the existence of different cultures conditions the existence of different virtues. However, to counteract this at least slightly, some virtue ethicist proclaimed the virtue of integrity to be common to all people, even if the wholesome sets of virtues may differ due to social contextualization. The virtue of integrity is crucial for the sole existence of virtues, otherwise, if not practised consistently, we cannot claim to possess something virtuous, however, a cynic may say that if an individual finds himself in a thoroughly hostile environment where there is no kindness, no fairness, no elements that we could commonsensically consider virtuous, one would end up being an entire different person than what Aristotle imagines. An example of such thinking could be portrayed with Thrasymachus who conveyed a purely materialistic, brutal condition of the human state and argued in favour of living the life out of self-interest. We do whatever we want to do, we care about our own good only and in such a manner achieve some distorted form of a good life. Well, there is the element of consistency, is it not? We reassert our “virtues” through our selfish actions and take this example based on our natural condition and environment we find ourselves in. This discussion could go on ad infinitum so what remains is our intuitive belief that Thrasymachus is mistaken – after all, after sitting in this chair for the past three hours, my interests definitely lay elsewhere yet I do not experience the brutal disregard Thrasymachus shows towards the world, who would potentially already storm out of the classroom in the throes of irritation.

The discussion on the condition of man contrasted the Aristotelian and Thrasymachian human being, but somehow I do not find the somewhat intuitive conclusion of rejection of the latter satisfactory enough, because of that, I will return to Kantian man once more in order to show that what we do end up with is a person of Aristotelian virtue. As I said before, Kant deems inclinations inferior to his moral theory, the only emotion he permits is the admiration for moral law, admiration for duty. However, by this he creates a false dichotomy, portraying reason as a somewhat divine capability of man that is always stable and obtainable to anyone, while emotions are by necessity shallow, temporal, capricious. But – if we perhaps consider the emotion of care

out of which the virtue of caring can be derived, we notice a certain discrepancy between how Kant presents the nature of emotions in moral thinking and how it (perhaps) actually is. To proclaim someone to be caring, this person had to show continuous caring behaviour and dispositions to it. The emotion of caring is not something you feel only three days out of seven or something that appears if the cosmological bodies are positioned just in a certain way. The emotion of care is stable, we nurture its stability and we act in accordance with it. When a caring person finds itself in a situation of, perhaps, having to work some extra hours due to his or hers co-worker having a family emergency, the emotion of care conveys understanding for the plight of another person and influences our actions, even if this person had a bad day and he still has to go grocery shopping etc. In such cases, Kant's disregard for emotions due to them being whimsical fails, because some emotions we feel are equally, or even more stable than the reason itself, that is often subjugated to unconditional praise - Kant claims that we have reason and through reason, we can be moral, but it is obvious that people do not always act morally in the Kantian sense, since they are autonomous, they can consciously reject their reason and act completely irrationally - in this way, the faith Kant puts into reason once again only increases the gap between his ideal man and our "flawed" selves. To conclude on this thought, some emotions can provide stable ground for rational judgement and be the source of virtues and hence morality as proclaimed by Aristotle - to disregard them is to once again turn our back on some of the most essential characteristics of humankind; the Aristotelian picture of man still holds a more holistic comprehension of who we are.

Human condition to which we have currently come has established some fine foundations upon which the final part of the essay will be constructed. The initial quote that was chosen alludes to our failure to examine ourselves and I believe that a certain part of this problem was resolved through the application of the virtue ethics, however, the ultimate goal of this essay is to come to a dialogical society in the Buberian sense. When speaking about acquisition of virtues through our environment, there was the role of teachers, parents etc. In order to somehow secure that those relations between "virtue-seekers" and "virtue-possessioners" will truly result in a virtuous society, I would like to apply Martin Buber's I-thou relation. His peculiar philosophy is something to be understood in a deeply intimate way - he speaks of Encounter where a man encounters a man, but through will and grace to achieve the "space in between." Buber distinguishes two relations: I-It and I-Thou (you), where the former represents the cold, impartial relation of us towards an object (even if it is a person), a relation where we refuse or are incapable of comprehending the exclusive experience of our being through the other. When we engage in

I-Thou relation, we are seized by the indescribable momentum of uniqueness, exclusiveness, we become I as we look at Thou, to put it differently, we discover ourselves as we discover the other. This is not to say that every encounter is I-Thou Encounter, but it is important to emphasize that we often refuse to see the I-Thou relation, intentionally, perhaps. How many times have we chosen to look away when a beggar was asking for money, because we knew that looking him in the eyes would result in a certain flinch somewhere deep inside us where we would, just for a moment, comprehend his struggle and simultaneously see ourselves in a different way. How many times were we convinced that our idea was the best idea and haven't given a chance *to ourselves* to truly listen to someone else's suggestion? Similar situations are present constantly, we just look away. Such philosophical thought carries the elements of deep ecology, where there is no fact-value distinction - everything that exists is intrinsically valuable and with our wonder we are able to comprehend this - in a similar manner that Buber perceives the Encounter. He applies this unique experience to education, where the relation of the educator and of pupil should be genuine, a relation of I-Thou, only so the education of character can become the education of the society and genuine Dialogue, that is separate from technical dialogue (only to convey purely technical and objective information) and monologue disguised as a dialogue (a one sided relation among two conversationalists), can take place. Dialogue is not necessarily spoken, the attentive silence that is crucial to it plays the crucial role in the communication. Albeit a bit mystical, perhaps, Buber's philosophy enriches Aristotle's virtue ethics and adds this intimate dimension to the role of environment when acquiring virtues. Employing such Dialogue and forming I-Thou relations, the society can be transformed.

In conclusion I would like to briefly summarize the main points of this essay - through considerations of the rigorously moral Kantian man, crude, materialistic Thrasymachian individual and a virtuous Aristotelian person with a hint of Buber, I pondered on the condition of man and what this means for the society. To reflect back on the title I chose - where failure to examine ourselves results in loss of our integrity - my aim was to find a way where we have the ability to examine and establish ourselves as wholesome persons through nurturing of the virtues and establish a dialogical society where the conditions of the Dialogue enable for a flourishing life, *Eudaimonia*. In this sense I tried to convey the human image as I see it and as I would like to see it, because thinking about Tolerance being the topic for this year's IPO, I wanted to stray away from slightly clichéd notions of tolerance but instead establish something more genuine, something, that does not simply draw a line between me and you that we have to tolerate and respect, but instead seizes us in exclusivity of virtuousness.

