

4. Environmental Virtue Ethics

In the late 1950s Anscombe (1958) has made a significant contribution that inspired many ethicists to focus on the virtue perspective. Since then many philosophers analyzed the nature of moral goodness from the perspective of character traits that enable moral agent to do morally good deeds. The aretaic perspective has been also included into the discussion on our moral obligations towards natural world. Thus, Environmental Virtue Ethics (EVE) has been conceived.

There are many interesting and informative texts about EVE written by the discipline representatives for example: Philip Cafaro (2008, 2010, 2015), Louke van Wensveen (2000, 2005), Ronald Sandler (2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2017), Holmes Rolston III (2005), Geoffrey Frasz (1993), Thomas Jr. Hill (1983), Rosalind Hurtshouse (2007), or Robert Hull (2005). However, in this paper I want to focus on a three original approaches to the discipline that are examples of systematic and comprehensive interpretations of virtue theory in environmental ethics. These three are: 1. Classical environmental virtue ethics (Henry David Thoreau 1854/Philip Cafaro 2004); 2. Naturalistic, pluralistic and teleological environmental virtue ethics (Ronald Sandler 2007) and 2. Narrative environmental virtue ethics (Brian Treanor 2014).

What is virtue?

Virtue is one of the longest-debated terms in the history of moral philosophy and as such has been subject to various interpretations. In general, a virtue is defined in moral philosophy as a character trait or disposition that enables us to realize ethical goodness. However, the significance of virtues in a certain moral theory – catalogues of virtues as well as many aspects of virtue theory – has been understood in different ways by various philosophers.

The foundation to virtue ethics was laid down by Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics*. However, the modern revival of the virtue discussion is attributed to Anscombe (1958) and her paper on *Modern Moral Philosophy*, in which she criticized the contemporary moral discourse for its focus on moral deeds instead of moral character. After the publication of the paper, many philosophers started discussing virtues and analyzing moral character from more modern perspectives. Most of these discussions are built upon the foundation of this Stagirite's thought; however, there are a few modern interpretations that in some way try to apply the virtue approach to the moral challenges of our times. An example of such discourse is the discussion

on so-called environmental virtues (for example Sandler 2007; Treanor 2014; Cafaro 2004; van Wensveen 2000).

Virtue is a disposition to perform the right action. According to Aristotle, “a virtuous person is disposed to respond to the right thing, for the right reason, and in the right way, while also having the right desires and feelings about it” (Sandler 2017, 224). Moral virtue is a golden mean between the two extremes of excess and deficiency, and a virtuous person is disposed to apply the most appropriate action in a certain situation. As Aristotle writes, “both fear and confidence and appetite and anger and pity and in general pleasures and pain may be felt both too much or too little, and in both cases not well; but to feel them at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way, is both intermediate and the best, and this is characteristic of the virtue” (Aristotle, book 2, chapter 6). What is intermediate is the form of success; what is one of the extremes – either excess or deficiency – is a failure.

Thus, virtue is this golden mean that applies to action as well as emotions. For “anyone can get angry – that is easy – or give or spend money; but to do this to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way, that is not for everyone, nor is it easy; wherefore goodness is both rare and laudable and noble” (ibid.: book 2, chapter 9). As this philosopher explains (Ibid.: book 3, chapter 7), “when the coward, the rash and the brave man face a certain situation, they will react to this in various ways. And only a brave one is properly disposed, or virtuous enough to act in a right way and for the right motives. The other two man will react to either with excessive bravery or with its deficiency. To know how to react is not often but it is highly appreciated and virtuous. To know the golden mean for oneself and to act adequately to this knowledge is being virtuous”.

Thus, a virtue is a sort of skill or ability that disposes us to act in the right way. Virtue leads a moral agent to proper actions, thus making him a better person. This is why virtue is a mean of achieving human excellence. As is claimed in *Nicomachean Ethics*, “every virtue or excellence both brings into good condition the thing of which it is the excellence and makes the work of that thing be done well” (ibid.: book 2, chapter 6). Analogously, virtue makes a person a good man and enables him to do his work well. Virtue provides the moral flourishing of a person and enables one to become the best version of oneself.

Since the beginning of moral philosophy, being virtuous meant being a better version of oneself; however, Aristotle gave the term ‘virtue’ a moral meaning. Before him this term was associated with non-moral qualities, namely with the execution of one’s social role: “virtues just are those qualities which sustain a free man in his role and which manifest

themselves in those actions which his role requires” (See: Macintyre 1984, 122). Thus, in Homeric poems there is a virtue (*arête*) of athletes and soldiers which is mostly related to proper execution of one’s duties. Being a soldier means having physical strength. No contemporary moral philosophers would claim that being virtuous is equal to being in good physical condition or being strong. This example shows that terms used in moral philosophy change their meaning and that every era can have specific virtues that are adjusted to facing contemporary moral challenges or – to speak in Aristotelian terms – we need a virtue that enables us to act in the right way. This does not mean that cardinal virtues are no longer valid and that we should eradicate them from all moral theories; various virtues are indeed important elements of moral life, irrespective of cultural conditions one have to be good person and *phronesis* provides us a guidance in choosing the right virtue at the proper time. However, it has to be emphasized that new challenges and changes in the conditions in which human beings live create the need for virtues that are conducive to dealing more effectively with the moral challenges of our times.

1. Classical environmental virtue ethics

The term “classical” means either relating to the culture of ancient Rome and Greece or something traditional in style or form (Web-01). The concept of EVE analyzed in this part of the paper is classical in both meanings. First of all, Thoreau’s philosophy and experiences at the lake Walden can be perceived as a way of pursuing virtue in an Aristotelian style. This interpretation has been presented in Cafaro’s analysis (2004) and is the reason why Thoreau’s writing is an example of classical philosophy. Second of all, Thoreau is one of the best examples of virtues like simplicity or respect for nature, it is common among environmental ethicists to perceive him as an iconic example of pursuing the noble character traits. Thus, his philosophy can be perceived as classical in a second meaning as well.

The classical EVE has two contributors. One is Thoreau and the other is Cafaro. Including the second philosopher might raise some controversies, however it could be explained by the fact that Cafaro has made a significant input into analyzing Thoreau’s thought in Aristotelian terms (2004). The thinker from Concord has written works that need some deeper philosophical interpretation, and some of his writings has been analyzed as an input to epistemology (Cavell, 1972) or to the discussion on the relation between science and philosophy (Walls 1995). In the same way Cafaro make a comprehensive analysis of Thoreau’s book in the terms of aretaic approach. He noticed that “Henry Thoreau went to Walden Pond to become a better person, defining this broadly to include increased knowledge, an enriched

experience, character development, creative achievement, and greater personal integrity. Significantly, in describing his [Thoreau's] own goals or prescribing goals for his readers, he often speaks of cultivating »virtue« or »the virtues«” (Cafaro 2004: 45). For Thoreau the stay at the Walden lake is a personal pursuit of moral excellence and virtue in an ancient style. Namely, in a way that “includes physical, intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual excellence” (ibid.: 46).

According to Cafaro (2004: 57-58) virtues in *Walden* could be split into six following categories:

1. Personal virtues, among which are: aspiration, austerity, bravery, confidence, contentment, deliberation, earnestness, economy, enterprise, hopefulness, independence, industry, innocence, integrity, living in the present, manliness, persistence, pride, prudence, punctuality, resolution, self-reliance, serenity, simplicity, spontaneity, stoicism, temperance, wakefulness.
2. Social virtues – crucial for good relations with the others, like: affection, charity, chastity, cheerfulness, civility, compassion, conviviality, dignity, fidelity, frankness, friendliness, geniality, generosity, harmony, hospitality, humanity, humility, humor, justice, liberality, love, philanthropy, purity, rectitude, self-respect, sincerity, sympathy, tenderness, trust.
3. Intellectual virtues, for example: adventurousness, alertness, clear-headedness, curiosity, cultivation, focus, honesty, imagination, intelligence, patience, sagacity, self-knowledge, sense of history, studiousness, tirelessness, thoughtfulness, truthfulness, wisdom.
4. Aesthetic virtues, that enable one to appreciate beauty in nature: appreciation of beauty, close watching, creativity, expressiveness, faith, gratitude, originality, refinement, reverence, sensibility to beauty, sensitivity, skill in particular crafts, wildness.
5. Physical virtues, like: beauty, cleanliness, flexibility, grace, hardiness, health, physical endurance, stillness, strength, vigor.
6. Superlative virtues that exemplify supererogation, like: exuberance, heroic striving, heroism, holiness, loftiness, magnanimity, magnificence, nobility.

2. Naturalistic, pluralistic and teleological environmental virtue ethics

The naturalistic, pluralistic and teleological environmental virtue ethics is proposed by Ronald Sandler. His concept is built on naturalistic concept of goodness, which says that moral goodness has its roots in the biological perception of what is good. It denotes that every living being has its own goodness which is appropriate for the species this organism belongs to. His

concept is teleological because he claims that every living being has its goal (gr. *telos*) to which it aims and human goal is to achieve happiness (eudaimonia) through morally good actions. And it is pluralistic because it claims that human being can realize eudaimonistic as well as noneudaimonistic ends. The eudaimonistic ends are those that serves moralized happiness, while noneudaimonistic are these which serves any other being that ourselves.

According to Sandler human being is ethically good (virtuous) insofar as she is well fitted with respect to her (i) emotion; (ii) desires; (iii) actions (from reason and inclination); whether she is thus well fitted is determined by whether these aspects well serve: 1. her survival; 2. the continuance of the species; 3. her characteristic freedom from pain and characteristic enjoyment; 4. the good functioning of her social groups; 5. her autonomy; 6. the accumulation of knowledge; 7. meaningful life – in the way characteristic of human being; 8. the realization of any noneudaimonistic ends in the way characteristic of human beings.

Sandler propose the following list of environmental virtues:

1. Land virtues – inspired by Leopold's thought, virtues that make a human being good citizen of biotic community. Love, considerateness, attunement, ecological sensitivity, gratitude.
2. Virtues of sustainability – that promotes the integrity of ecosystems so that they can produce goods necessary for human health. Temperance, frugality, farsightedness, attunement, humility.
3. Virtues of communion with nature – dispositions that allow people to enjoy and be benefitted by the natural environment. Wonder, openness, aesthetic sensibility, attentiveness, love.
4. Virtues of respect for nature. Care, compassion, restitutive justice, non-maleficence, ecological sensitivity.
5. Virtues of environmental activism – dispositions conducive to maintaining the goods acquired through virtues of sustainability and benefits derive from virtues of communion with nature. Cooperativeness, commitment, optimism, creativity.
6. Virtues of environmental stewardship – same definition as for virtues of environmental activism. Benevolence, loyalty, justice, honesty, diligence.

3. Narrative environmental virtue ethics

Bryan Treanor raises the question about how to make environmental virtue ethics a concept that is applied to our daily moral practice. According to him we can achieve it by popularizing virtues through narration, id est the literature that promotes virtuous behaviors. This literature will provide a proper narration which would guide people and help them to make right moral choices. The aim of pursuing virtue is to achieve *metanoia* – personal change. He develops Sandler’s definition of virtuous person including narration. Thus, human being is ethically good (virtuous) insofar as she is well fitted with respect to her (i) emotion; (ii) desires; (iii) actions (from reason and inclination); whether she is thus well fitted is determined by whether these aspects well serve: 1. Her survival; 2. The continuance of the species; 3. Her characteristic freedom from pain and characteristic enjoyment; 4. The good functioning of her social groups; 5. Her autonomy; 6. The accumulation of knowledge; 7. Meaningful life – in the way characteristic of human being; 8. The realization of any noneudaimonistic ends in the way characteristic of human beings; 9. that virtues are traits that have a *kalon* aspect to them and which we understand narratively; and, therefore, a fully articulated virtue ethics must include a robust narrative component.

According to him there are three kinds of virtues: 1. the ones that serve individual flourishing; 2. the ones that serve social flourishing; 3. the ones that serve environmental flourishing. They are overlapping each other and the example of them is presented in the picture below

Virtue

