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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Dignity and Vulnerability: Strength and Quality of Character* by George W. Harris

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then only when taxonomized as self- and other-regarding and judged of equal importance.

Three Methods has two natural audiences: those wanting an update on topics of current debate and those wanting a textbook for upper-level undergraduates. For the first audience, the book, particularly with its fine references, is very useful. For the second audience, the book should provoke lively debate; the most serious drawbacks are the absences of the contractualist tradition and of the arguments motivating Kant.

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DIGNITY AND VULNERABILITY: STRENGTH AND QUALITY OF CHARACTER. By GEORGE W. HARRIS. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997. Pp. 148.

George Harris argues that human frailty, indeed vulnerability to utter and complete psychological breakdown in the form “a loss of the will to live, deep clinical depression, insanity, hysteria, debilitating shame, [and] pervasive self-deception,” is a source of our special dignity as persons. This type of fragility is a sign of a higher quality of character, he argues; a quality that is lacking in anyone who has the inner strength to survive the worst of life’s hardships without suffering “a form of personal disintegration that renders the person dysfunctional as an agent” (4). This is a striking and extreme thesis. It is not the less controversial and more plausible thesis that virtue involves a capacity to experience, in the right way and at the right time, a broad range of feelings and emotions. An investigation of the psychological traits and vulnerabilities that are connected to virtue is a very interesting topic worthy of extensive discussion. Although this book contributes to this worthwhile discussion, the argument for the book’s controversial thesis is not convincing.

The book has three parts. The first three chapters present an argument for the thesis that personal love and loyalty can result in the types of “benign integral breakdown” described above. Chapters 4–6 argue that Kantian conceptions of respect, pure practical reason, and dignity are undermined by the (alleged) benign nature of integral breakdown and the vulnerability and fragility of character that is essential to human dignity. The final three chapters of the book claim to address the obvious objections that the preconditions of integral breakdown are a matter for *clinical psychology* and that there is no reason to assume that the pathologies associated with integral breakdown are an essential consequence of virtue. Har-

ris, however, switches immediately from this question to a discussion of Epicurean and Stoic conceptions of virtue. Those interested in the recent work of Julia Annas and Martha Nussbaum may find this part of the book interesting, but I do not see how it addresses the obvious objection that the psychological conditions that lead to a complete psychological breakdown are independent of the virtues of loyalty and love.

Harris's main argument in the first third of the book is based on the fictional example of the disintegration and suicide of Sophie in the novel *Sophie's Choice*, by William Styron. According to Harris, the source of Sophie's downfall is simply that she possesses in such an exceptional degree the virtue of love. He does not, however, explain why she is disposed to "love so deeply" and commits suicide with Nathan *in particular*—a schizophrenic who is psychologically abusive and who torments her about her past. Sophie's suicide is not a simple consequence of her capacity to love so deeply. It results from the accumulation of the influences of an authoritarian, antisemitic father, the self-doubt and the deep guilt that resulted from the choice to pick one of her children to be saved upon entering the concentration camps, her own failed attempts to exploit antisemitism while in the concentration camps, and finally the resulting disposition to enter into a masochistic relationship *with someone like* Nathan. It is not the virtue of love that sustains her self-destructive and ultimately suicidal relationship with Nathan. It is not that she cares for him so much, it is that she is tortured by guilt and thus cares for herself so little. Although *we* may not blame Sophie for her choice, *she* clearly blames herself and it is this, and not the virtues of attachment and caring for others, that accounts for her end. This example does not establish that the virtues of care necessarily increase one's vulnerability to integral breakdown.

The arguments of the last three chapters of the book also do not support Harris's more controversial thesis. In response to Epicureans, for example, Harris argues that "the dangers of grief and sorrow are part of the life well lived for those who care about others" and then simply assumes that this supports the strong thesis that "if the more serious harms are realized, integral stress will sooner or later reach its threshold" (99). As far as I could see, no argument is produced that the desirable connections that make us susceptible to deep grief and sorrow must also make us susceptible to pervasive self-deception or suicidal self-destruction. Why assume that the sorrow that results from the loss of a loved one, for example, is also a form of *integral stress* that in itself results in the disintegration of an otherwise fully virtuous person? Although Harris argues admirably against the thesis that we should strive to eliminate or transcend the sources of emotional vulnerabilities in life, he does not explain why he thinks that susceptibility to grief, sorrow, or the pains of betrayal is on a par with, and has the same source as, susceptibility to integral breakdown. Yes, some people do have

psychological breakdowns under extreme hardship, but from this it does not follow that the *virtues* of attachment are the source of this vulnerability.

Harris's response to the Stoics seems to apply to his own position on integral breakdown. He asks, "What is the argument or clinical data that suggests that one cannot be deeply passionate without being disposed to murderous thoughts should things go wrong?" (118). He goes on to argue that *reflective distance* can tame the types of excesses of emotion that undermine virtue and inner peace. Similarly, we ask, what is the argument or clinical data that suggests that the attachments of love, family, and community must render us vulnerable to suicidal thoughts (which are murderous thoughts) or pervasive self-deception? As I suggested above, it is implausible to see Sophie's fate as a simple result of the virtue of love rather than as the result of undue guilt and self-hatred.

The middle three chapters of the book focus on Kantian conceptions of respect, dignity, and pure practical reason. This part of the book is packed with more arguments than the rest of the book. Chapter 4 focuses on Kant's reasons for thinking that the subjects of moral principles must have a capacity to be moved by a faculty of pure practical reason. Chapter 5 argues, first, that the dignity of humanity is linked to a capacity to overcome difficulties and obstacles in an effort to live a good life, and second, that the vulnerabilities that this involves are incompatible with the Kantian conceptions of the value of the good will, pure practical reason, and Kantian conceptions of dignity. Chapter 6 attempts to connect, in a more explicit way, the rejection of a Kantian conception of morality and dignity with the virtues that Harris associates with vulnerability to integral breakdown. There is much of interest in this part of the book and Harris presents many provocative claims worthy of more extensive discussion and argument. His overall goal is to show that the source of our intrinsic worth is not the Kantian good will or the capacity for pure practical reason but is instead the pathological features of human agency. Although I cannot here do justice to these arguments, there is, I would argue, an important equivocation on the meaning and place of impartial respect in Kantian ethics that infects Harris's overall discussion of these issues.

It is important to distinguish the concept of respect, which Kant identifies with respect for the moral law, and which Kantians identify with treating persons as ends-in-themselves, from a more narrow normative principle of impartial respect that involves non-interference with the negative freedom ("autonomy") of others. Harris does not distinguish these distinct concepts of respect. Indeed, he distinguishes instead "impartial sympathy" and "impartial respect" (which is really a contrast between principled beneficence and non-interference), and he then argues that "impartial respect" or "respect for autonomy" is often regulated by the norm of "impartial sympathy" (that is, beneficence)—which is plausible enough. Har-

ris, however, assumes that Kant and Kantians must deny this. He argues that this conclusion implies that the natural inclination of sympathy sometimes regulates respect for the moral law and that this in turn proves that practical reason is regulated by the pathological aspects of our character. Morality thus is not a result of pure practical reason, he concludes.

There are three confusions here. First, we need to distinguish the motive of duty that Kant identifies with respect for the moral law from the mid-level norms of respect for persons that Kant derives from the categorical imperative. Treating persons as ends involves respecting their capacity to direct their own lives and respecting their privacy in various ways. One aspect of morality is thus a general normative principle of non-interference with others and with their pursuit of their permissible ends. In addition, however, Kant argues that treating persons as ends also involves recognizing duties of beneficence and indeed willing the happiness of others as an end. If one indeed has the happiness of others as an end, then one will be affected by their weal and woe and will experience the full range of emotions associated with attachment and community. Without going on unduly, we can say that respect for the moral law generates both the norms of "impartial sympathy" and "impartial respect" for particular persons, and so there is no conflict here with Kantian normative theory or with the primacy of pure practical reason. Second, Harris seems to mistakenly identify a *principle* of impartial sympathy with a mere *inclination*. Kant and Kantians, however, endorse the norm of principled sympathy as well as the mutual love and benevolence that result in beneficence (see, e.g., Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals*, 449). As Harris seems to realize, the norm of "impartial sympathy" is not a mere inclination; it requires reflection and refinement, and it is the result of a recognition of the equal standing of others and of a commitment to the good of others. Third, Harris thus has not shown that treating rational beings as ends-in-themselves necessarily excludes having a norm of impartial beneficence regulate respect in the form of a norm of non-interference. Of course, the relationship between these two norms is a question that turns on familiar issues about the justification of paternalism and the relative weight of positive and negative duties. Some Kantians take a strong position on the right to self-determination of competent and informed adults, but in principle a Kantian can recognize that norms of non-interference and of beneficence have a symmetrical regulative effect or function. The correct relationship between these norms, for the Kantian, is a substantive issue about how one best treats persons as ends-in-themselves.

As a result of these concerns, I am not convinced that Harris has exposed a problem with the Kantian conception of morality and pure practical reason. As far as I can tell, contemporary Kantians emphasize the centrality of the virtues in a manner that is sympathetic to Harris's basic focus on

the virtues of connection and the role of the emotions in a virtuous moral life. Since Harris does not provide a theory of the emotions that supports his more controversial claims, and since his basic assumption that love and the virtues of connection are necessarily possible sources of integral breakdown is controversial, his overall argument is not convincing. Still, *Dignity and Vulnerability* is a provocative book. I suspect that others will benefit, as I have, from Harris's engaging discussion of the admirable vulnerabilities of human nature.

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MORAL APPRAISABILITY: PUZZLES, PROPOSALS AND PERPLEXITIES. By ISHTIYAQUE HAJI. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. Pp. ix, 272.

Moral Appraisability is not quite such a good book as its confident and lucid introduction leads one to hope, but it is work of both substance and promise. Ishtiyaque Haji's main project is to determine sufficient conditions for moral appraisability: that is, for the propriety of holding an agent praiseworthy or blameworthy for an action. Identifying three primary conditions—control, autonomy, and epistemic—he refines them with the aid of a meticulous analysis of recent discussions and a range of vivid examples, and applies them in his closing chapters to such vexed questions as the responsibility of addicts for their addictive behavior, the justification of cross-cultural attributions of blame, and our appraisability for our thoughts when dreaming.

Haji's control condition for appraisability requires that the agent have volitional control of the action: in brief, she must intend to perform it and the intention must arise from a process of practical reasoning that appeals to an "evaluative scheme," that is, to the congress of values, priorities, and dispositions, not necessarily fully rational or even fully conscious, that guide an agent in deciding whether to act in accordance with a particular desire in given circumstances. (A person lacking an "evaluative scheme" in this wide sense would be a pathological case, helplessly propelled by the relative strength of occurrent desires: though we might view her with alarm and repugnance, she would not in Haji's terms be morally appraisable.) Haji rejects the competing "alternative possibilities" condition with the aid of "Frankfurt-type" examples,¹ in which an agent chooses to commit a wrong act but would have been caused to commit it anyway, had she hes-

¹Harry Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," *Journal of Philosophy* 66 (1969): 829–39.