

Critical Virtue Ethics

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Since the publication of Anscombe's famous paper "Modern Moral Philosophy" (1958), virtue ethics has become a matter of discussion among scholars. At least four charges have been raised against virtue ethics, one of which is the charge of promoting undue enthusiasm regarding the moral fitness of human beings. This article explores the limits of virtue ethics with regard to the frailty of human virtuousness. After giving a report of the charges raised against virtue ethics from the perspective of empirical ethics, the author presents the idea of what he would like to call critical virtue ethics as seen by three Lutheran thinkers: Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Luther himself. He will demonstrate that the empirical contestation of virtue ethics shows a remarkable resemblance to insights found in Luther, Kant and Nietzsche. And finally, the writer draws tentative conclusions about the future of critical virtue ethics.

Keywords: Virtue ethics, empirical ethics, Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Luther.

Elisabeth Anscombe's famous paper "Modern Moral Philosophy" (1958) is often looked at as the starting point for the renaissance of virtue and virtue ethics. Since its publication in 1958, much has been written both in favor of and against the assumption that virtue and character can be fruitful for rethinking ethics in our times. The promise of virtue ethics appears to lie in its "holistic" view of the human being, which integrates well-being and moral goodness, personal flourishing and moral maturation. But the praise of virtue ethics has also been countered by fundamental objections (Solomon 1988). If I am not mistaken, there are essentially four charges that are raised against virtue ethics. Firstly, it is argued that virtue ethics does not help us when we need to choose between doing *a* or *b*: virtue

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ethics does not provide us with moral guidance (Hursthouse 1999; Nussbaum 1988, 35ff). Secondly, virtue ethics is charged with maintaining an undue enthusiasm regarding the moral fitness of human beings. Empirically oriented versions of moral psychology have claimed to prove that human beings do not have the robust character traits that one would expect if such a thing as virtue existed. Even apparently minor situational variables have a tremendous impact on people's decisions. In response to this charge, it has been argued that virtues are not merely dispositions to act in a certain way. The question then is this: If virtues are more than dispositions to act, what *is* the significance of virtue beyond predisposing a person to perform well morally? Thirdly, there is the charge of egotism, which claims that to seek virtues is to be concerned only with oneself. I think that this charge is quite obviously unfair, since relational attitudes are ranked highly among the virtues. Finally, there is the charge of cultural contingency. It is argued that any system or catalogue of virtue ethics is embedded in particular cultural narratives, in historically contingent traditions and values that are only locally binding. Some people would argue that this charge is simply wrong. Aristotelian virtue ethics could have a non-relative basis, either in reason or in other universal anthropological constants. Martha Nussbaum, for example, tries to show that there are indeed universal values on which local virtues are based, such as responding to human need and the flourishing of the human being. This is surely a strong point, and I agree that virtue ethics can be reconstructed along universalistic lines of argument, *but only to an extent*. I also think that if we restrict ourselves to reconstructing virtue ethics in a universal realm, we run the risk of cutting ourselves off from the fecundity of the imagery of particular traditions of virtue ethics. Therefore, approaches to virtue ethics ought to be introduced to and negotiated in intercultural settings.² Yet the focus of this article will not be on the intercultural dimensions of virtue ethics itself, but rather on the second charge against virtue ethics. I will look at the limits of virtue ethics with regard to the frailty of human virtuousness, indeed the propensity of virtues to transform into vices. I would therefore like to begin by giving a report of the charges raised against virtue ethics from the perspective of empirical ethics and then continue by presenting the idea of what I would like to call critical virtue ethics as seen by three Lutheran thinkers: Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Luther himself. We shall see that the empirical contestation of virtue

2. This paper was presented to the Conference on Contemporary Philosophy of Religion with Focus on Religion, Ethics and Culture, Tehran 2015.

ethics shows a remarkable resemblance to insights found in Luther, Kant and Nietzsche. Finally, I will draw tentative conclusions about the future of critical virtue ethics.

Critique of Virtues by Moral Psychology

The infamous Stanford prison experiment and the Milgram experiment have shaken the faith of those who too optimistically believed in the goodness and moral capacity of human beings. Numerous studies on man's propensity to fall prey to manipulation have followed (Milgram 2009). When these studies are discussed today, scholars often also refer to the so called "Samaritans Experiment", which evaluated the degree of helpfulness shown by theology students at the Princeton center of Theological Inquiry when confronted with someone who was in need of support (Darley and Batson 1973). The result of the Samaritans Experiment was that the amount of time pressure that the test subjects were exposed to was *the* overwhelming factor for predicting their behavior; time pressure influenced the readiness of the test subjects to help far more than any other situational factor or personal trait. When it comes to the question of what one should conclude from these observations, there seem to be three options. First, one could conclude that there simply are no virtues, that is, that there are no morally good character traits and that the renaissance of virtue ethics aims to rehabilitate an ultimately empty concept. This is the conclusion that Gilbert Harman and John Doris have drawn (Doris 2005; Harman 2000; Merritt, Doris, and Harman 2010). Second, one could work towards a defense of virtue ethics, as Christine Swanton and others have done (Swanton 2005). People who argue along these lines have emphasized that virtues are more than character traits that allow one to predict how someone will act.³ Instead, virtues enable people to respond to the world⁴ in an excellent or good enough way, as argued by Christine Swanton.⁴ This would include emotional reactions and thus exceed actions that can be observed and measured, and then virtue ethics would not rely on the assumption that virtuous people were immune to extrinsic motivational factors that threaten their virtuousness. Third, one could respond to the critique against virtue ethics by refining the very concept of virtue ethics itself, and indeed this is what I intend to do as I work towards what I would like to call *critical virtue ethics*. The majority of my article will show how the contemporary critique of

3. See also Miller (2003, 367).

4. Swanton (2005, 33): "A virtue is a good quality of character, more specifically a disposition to respond to, or acknowledge, items within its fields or fields in an excellent or good enough way."

virtue ethics had been anticipated and replied to by the pre-modern and early modern approaches to virtue ethics that we find in Luther, Kant and Nietzsche. These approaches share an awareness of feigned virtues, or pseudo-virtues, as I would like to call them.⁵ It seems to me that pseudo-virtues essentially fall into two categories: *Outwardly deceptive* pseudo-virtues are virtues that aim to make others think that I am virtuous, they are hypocritical and sanctimonious virtues. In contrast, *inwardly deceptive* or indeed self-deceptive virtues are virtues that people sincerely believe they possess, and yet this belief is erroneous because they have fallen prey to self-deception. For example, I may sincerely believe that I am genuinely helpful and kind, though in truth I am only helpful if I profit from it. The aforementioned empirical research shows that human beings often think too highly of themselves in moral terms, therefore, their virtues are inwardly deceptive or self-deceptive pseudo-virtues more often than not. I will come back to this distinction while I make my way through the critiques of virtue as developed by Luther, Kant and Nietzsche.

Luther: Suffering and Compassion

At first sight, Luther's comments on virtue fall into two categories: He distinguishes sharply between the "worthless" virtues of the heathens and philosophers, and the true virtues that are given by God. These latter virtues can only be received from God, they are never acquired by one's own effort. In contrast to these divinely inspired virtues, the virtues of the world are nothing but a cover up for sin. All the virtues of nature and reason are sin, says Luther (WA 10/1, 1, 409, 10–13),⁶ and indeed such virtues are used to cover vices, for example: stinginess is camouflaged as prudence (WA 41, 293, 10–14). Those who merely practice outward-virtues are really hypocrites (WA.Br 1, 70 [No. 27, 29–32]; WA 56, 171, 20ff). The pseudo-virtues of the heathen may sparkle beautifully, but they lack true value (WA 6,

5. On feigned virtues, cf. Herdt (2008).

6. For a more extensive version of the following argument, cf. Schmidt (2015, 8–20). – References refer to the standard edition of Luther's works (WA = D. Martin Luthers Werke, Weimar 1883ff.) and also to the American translation (LW = Luther's Works, Philadelphia 1958ff.) if available.

7. LW 25, 151: "For this reason the life of the princes in this world, of lawyers, and of all those who have to maintain their position by power and wisdom is threatened by the gravest dangers. For when these advantages do not become apparent and are hidden even to the smallest the people themselves count for nothing. But when they are present, then 'there is the death in the pot' (2 Kings 4:40, especially if they enjoy it in their hearts that these things are on display before men and are esteemed by them. For it is difficult to hide from your own heart and to despise what is apparent to everyone else and is highly esteemed)."

266,2ff.).⁸ The pedantic moralists think themselves virtuous, though their true expertise lies in revealing other people's moral shortcomings, they lack compassion and mercy and ignore their own sins (WA 32, 321, 29–37; WA 32, 366, 4–14). Since the sinner is incapable of true virtue, he can only become virtuous by means of a “happy exchange”, that is, when God's justice, virtue and holiness are exchanged with the sin of the sinner (WA 9, 224, 22–25). True virtues are not an intrinsic part of human beings, they do not permanently exist in man (*habitus*); true virtues are gifts, events within the relationship between God and man.¹⁰ Such virtues are only possible in the concrete encounter with the other – “the other” meaning God and also the other human being, as I now would like to point out.

While Luther uncompromisingly rejects virtues which may lead man to applaud himself for achievements of virtuousness, he speaks affirmatively and without inhibition about the interpersonal virtues of the Christian (WA 34/1, 446a, 4–6).¹¹ Luther's concept of interpersonal virtues combines New Testament ideas with the Aristotelian concept of *epieikeia*, gentleness (WA 1, 254, 2–4; WA 32, 315, 27ff. [LW 21, 22f.]; WA 17/2, 113, 30ff.). It is important to understand *how* Luther thinks such virtues evolve. Luther claims that to become virtuous means that what is proprietary to man is broken, thus exhibiting how deeply his thinking is embedded in medieval mysticism. Man is like a crude log that must become mild/smooth (*gelinde*) (WA 24, 177b, 19–24). To Luther, the highest virtue of man is a gentleness which completely and happily adheres to God's will.

8. The claim that the pseudo-virtues sparkle beautifully calls into mind the famous phrase “the virtues of the heathens are but splendid vices” that is attributed to Augustine, though Luther cannot have been aware of it (Czelinski-Uesbeck 2007, 31). The phrase is not contained in Augustine's works, though Augustine does present virtues as inflated and proud. Cf. Augustine (2007, 244f. [ciu. 19, 25]) and Irwin (2007, 418f.).

9. LW 21, 29: “One of the virtues of counterfeit sanctity is that it cannot have pity or mercy for the frail and weak, but insists on the strictest enforcement and the purest selection; as soon as there is even a minor flaw, all mercy is gone, and there is nothing but fuming and fury”; LW 21, 80: “Many people who are otherwise fine, respectable, learned, and upstanding become filled with secret anger, envy, and hate, and are embittered by it. Still they never become aware of it, and their conscience is satisfied that what they are doing is in pursuit of their office or in obedience to righteousness. Their screen is so lovely and delusive that no one dares to speak of them as anything but pious and outstanding people. The ultimate result is a sin against the Holy Spirit and hardened hearts, which become confirmed and obdurate in this poisonous vice. There are two aspects of this wickedness. In the first place, the heart is full of anger, hate and envy. But in the second place, it refuses to admit that this is sin and malice, but wants to be called virtue; this amounts to slapping God across the mouth and calling him a liar in His words.”

10. On Luther and Aristoteles cf. Schmidt (2015).

11. WA 37, 147, 35: “Christiana virtus et fidei fructus.”

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But no human being ever really wants what God wants. Therefore, to acquire virtue means that human beings are dispossessed. Genuine virtues do not sparkle like the pseudo-virtues, they are more often dark like suffering. For instance, Luther's interpretation of the Old Testament narrative of the flood shows that to suffer and to bear the shortcomings of our brothers is the highest virtue: just like tar pitch seals the planks of a vessel, suffering prevents man from sinking completely (WA 24, 177, 19–24). Suffering here adopts the ethical sense of a radical openness for the idiosyncrasy and the need for other human beings, including our enemies.¹² So to become gentle does not only mean to be dispossessed, it also means to be able to relate to the other person precisely because "my" self-will is no longer obstructing "my" perception of the other person. *Epieikeia*, gentleness is the virtue that enables human beings to no longer be self-possessed but rather to seek to be helpful to others (WA 7, 514, 7–12). Compassion means to see the other's misery (WA 36/1, 329, 6f.; WA 36/1, 329, 12f.). So the virtue of empathy (*induere affectuum*) is in no way patronizing, it is the ability to let the other affect one's self.

"Love does not insist in its own way," [1. Cor 13:5] that is, it causes man to deny himself and to affirm another, to put on affection for the neighbor and put off affection for himself, to place himself in the person of his neighbor and then to decide what he wants him to do for him himself and what he himself and others might do for him. (WA 56, 484, 10 [LW 25, 477])¹³

Those who obey the commandment to love one's neighbor, will always keep an eye on where the other person is at, and then, says Luther, all conflicts will cease and the whole confraternity of virtues (*virtutum collegium*) will be present (WA 56, 485, 3-7 [LW 25, 477]).

I will pause for a short moment to deliberate where this is taking us. I have cast only a spotlight on Luther's discussion of virtue to show that Luther was well aware of the frailty of virtues. To some extent, Luther anticipated the latest skepticism as regards virtues articulated by moral psychologists. Now the concept that Luther develops is obviously very "Christian", but it might have a potential that can reach beyond the confines of Christianity. Virtues are strictly presented as virtues of the second person. The spiritual journey of man

12. The weakness of the suffering person is an *attitude* rather than a *state* and thus distinct from utter passivity. Cf. Leivestad (1966, 164).

13. Cf. WA 56, 483, 22ff. (LW 25, 476): "[R]ich men supply the priests with treasures for the building of a church or a memorial. But if they would put themselves in the position of the poor and ask themselves whether they would want it donated not to themselves but rather to the churches, they would easily learn from themselves what they ought to do."

leads to dispossession and that in turn enables one to get in touch with the other person. Perception and gentleness then turn out to be key aspects, and these are of course ideas that already loom large in Aristotle. So to rethink virtues as attitudes of openness to the other is inspiring and helpful and can well be linked back to traditional discourses beyond Christianity, but I think that this second-person perspective is not exhaustive. Human beings also need to relate to themselves in a productive kind of way. I think that Luther failed to see this, unlike later great Protestant thinkers like for example Immanuel Kant.

Kant: In/sincerity

During his attack on virtue ethics, Luther does not clearly distinguish between inwardly-deceptive and outwardly-deceptive pseudo-virtues, though I hasten to add that Luther believed that any moral failure was the working of sin, and sin distorts our heart and moral self-perception. Indeed self-deception is the root of sin, and thus is always present in Luther's account of pseudo-virtues albeit implicitly. Now Immanuel Kant, who was raised in the Protestant Pietistic tradition, shows a remarkable sensitivity to the problem of self-deception in his *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. For one thing, Kant distinguishes between a facility (or habit) of actions conforming to duty (*virtus phaenomenon*), and noumenal virtue (*virtus noumenon*), which is "a constant disposition towards moral actions from duty" (Kant 1998, 41 [AA 6, 14]). Actions conforming to duty could lead others to think that I am truly virtuous, though I lack real virtue because my motivation is corrupted by self-serving purposes. But the mere distinction between outward and inward does not yet get to the heart of the problem. Virtues that could deceive others to believe that I am virtuous are not what threatens morality as such, because my "heart" (meaning my inner motivation) is decisive and not what other people speculate about me. The real problem is that even the noumenal virtue is potentially corrupt because man is not self-transparent: "the depths of his own heart [...] are to him inscrutable" (Kant 1998, 71 [AA 6, 51]).¹⁴ In the blind angle of his self-perception there is "the *malice* of the heart which secretly undermines the [good] dispositions with soul-corrupting principles" (Kant 1998, 77 [AA 6, 57]). Malice is the real enemy of the virtue of prudence because malice "hides behind reason and is all the more dangerous" (Kant

14. Cf. also Kant (1998, 82 [AA 6, 63]): "Indeed, even a human being's inner experience of himself does not allow him so to fathom the depths of his heart as to be able to attain, through self-observation, an entirely reliable cognition of the basis of the maxims which he professes, and of their purity and stability."

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1998, 77 [AA 6, 57]). If there is an enemy within me hiding behind reason, then reason, which is the only legitimate foundation of morality, is prone to be corrupted. Consequently, I am in danger of self-deceptive error regarding my own virtuousness. In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant indicates that he has a deep sensitivity for the both inwardly-deceptive and outwardly-deceptive virtues as he points out that people deceive both others and themselves by adopting an advantageous¹⁵ appearance, indeed a make-up of genuine respectability. Surprisingly, Kant emphasizes that pseudo-virtue can actually turn into virtue, though at the end of the day, this provisional arrangement must be overcome by the revolution of one's mindset. And he also emphasizes in his posthumously published collection of papers called *Reflections on the Philosophy of Religion* that dishonesty with oneself is the radical evil:

The deceitfulness against others is [in so far] not the radical evil, since it can evolve from zealotry and the hypocrisy can come about incidentally. One pretends an excellence (merit) without noticing, just to avoid being spurned. So it is deceitfulness against oneself that is the radical evil. (Kant, *Reflections*, 8096 [AA 19,640, transl. my own])¹⁶

Accordingly, Kant also says in his unpublished notes that religion means: "confess yourself" (Kant, *Opus Postum* [AA 21, 81]).¹⁷

So what we find in Kant is an outline of inwardly-deceptive pseudo-virtuousness, of not even being able to *perceive* one's own true lack of virtuous motivation. Friedrich Nietzsche, in spite of essentially rejecting Kant's work, will continue full throttle along this path. Since self-deception looms large in human existence on the whole, sincerity is the only true virtue for Nietzsche – and this links him to Kant, who believed sincerity to be the main obligation man has to himself.

Nietzsche: Sincerity as the Last Virtue

I will begin by giving a few impressions of Nietzsche's numerous comments on virtue. All virtues, Nietzsche says, are completely mendacious and manipulative (Nietzsche, *The late notebooks* [= *Nachgelassene Fragmente* (NF)], NF-1888, 12 [1]),¹⁸ they are tyranny (Nietzsche 2003b, 167 [NF-1887, 9(153)]). People talk of virtue if

15. Cf. Kant (2006, 44f. [AA 7,153]); cf. Schmidt (2014, 52).

16. The text is crossed through in the manuscript, but I do think that it is fair to attribute this to Kant's opinion.

17. Cf. Stangneth (2000, 207f.).

18. The translations are my own (only a small selection of these writings was translated by Rüdiger Bittner, as will be noted).

they wish to re-label and thus ennoble their shortcomings. Virtues are mimicry, smoke-screen virtues (1986, 371), placard-virtues, sparkling and false works (2006, 235). Virtues are reinterpretations of weakness as strength (Nietzsche 1997a, 191 [No. 456]; 1997b, 25-27 [No.1, 13], 27ff. [No. 1, 14], 89–92 [No. 3, 14]), driven by the helpless envy for the virtues of those who are powerful (Nietzsche 2002, 153-56 [No. 260]). Nietzsche's harsh diagnosis of the sanctimonious preachers of virtue, who preach altruism though they are in truth driven by bigoted egomania, is compelling, though his dichotomy of good and bad virtues seems excessive. On the one hand, he reviles the "flock-virtues" (NF-1885, 34[96]) and the breeder-virtues, on the other hand, he praises the aristocratic (Nietzsche 2003b, 193 [NF-1887, 10(109)]) leader-virtues (NF-1884, 26[141]). *Aristocratic virtue is giving without reserve* (NF-1882, 4[45]), it is severity and cruelty against oneself (Nietzsche 1997a, 147 [No. 266]; NF-1881, 11 [87]). At first sight, this militant rhetoric of "good" virtues appears to be caught up in the potentially ideological glorification of the strong and cruel which Nietzsche generally tends to fall prey to. Yet hardness is not an end in itself. There is one virtue that remains when the everyday mendacious virtue-chitchat is shattered (Nietzsche 2002, 117f. [227]): honesty to oneself with no reserve, this is the only virtue "free of moralic acid" (Nietzsche 2003a, 128); honesty is the last virtue and a new virtue (Nietzsche 1997a, 191 [No. 456]; NF-1885, 1[145]). Honesty to oneself is hardness to oneself (Nietzsche 2006, 200-203; NF-1880, 6 [65]; NF-1880, 6 [229]: "You must undertake such a campaign against yourself every day," says Nietzsche (Nietzsche 1997a, 169 [No. 370]). Militant jargon penetrates Nietzsche's rhetoric of honesty, but it is not a blindly raging militarism, there is a goal to it: we shall work on our honesty with all virulence *and love* (Nietzsche 2002, 117f. [No. 227]), and, what is more: honesty is the prerequisite for meeting others with the dissimulation of love and kindness.

That love may be felt as love. We must be honest towards ourselves, and must know ourselves very well indeed, to be able to practice upon others that humane dissimulation known as love and kindness. (Nietzsche 1997a, 163 [No. 335])¹⁹

So honesty in all its harshness is not an end in itself, it helps one to understand and then to bear other human beings. If I look honestly at my own moral shortcomings and evasive fabrications, then I should be able to accept and appreciate other people in spite of their shortcomings. At the end of this road of uncompromising honesty,

19. Nietzsche speaks of dissimulation, because in his eyes, dissimulation is inevitable if human beings are to live with one another in peace (Nietzsche 1986, 136 [No. 293]).

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there is kindness, though the evolution of honesty is *inevitably* harsh and unaccommodating. Here we find a structural resemblance to Luther,²⁰ who speaks of love in a way quite different from Nietzsche but who also thinks that in order to love genuinely one must first endure the suffering of being dispossessed.

Critical Virtue Ethics

So where does this take us? “The virtues of the heathen are sparkling vices” – this judgment, which is ascribed to Augustine of Hippo, is seconded by Nietzsche and Luther and to some extent by Kant. Virtue is always at risk of collapsing. All virtue is drifting to stupidity and mendaciousness, Nietzsche says (Nietzsche 2002, 117f. [No. 227]),²¹ and Luther believes that the truly humble person can never think himself to be humble, lest he become proud. Virtues are prone to tilt into vices. Our heart is opaque even to ourselves, argues Kant, therefore our virtues are always at risk of becoming contaminated by self-serving motives. For Kant, the internal revolution, the moral conversion is the solution. In opposition to this, Luther and Nietzsche cannot relate to the idea of a complete revolution of the heart due to their profound moral pessimism, and it is this very pessimism that Luther and Nietzsche share with contemporary moral psychologists and their critique of virtue ethics. Yet in spite of their pessimism and unlike the contemporary critics of virtue ethics, Luther and Nietzsche both point towards a post-naïve account of virtue. Nietzsche emphasizes hardness and Luther emphasizes gentleness – though Nietzsche’s account for hardness contains the idea that hardness against oneself can enable one to become kind toward others, while in Luther’s account, gentleness is acquired by way of a process of maturation that in itself can be quite harsh. In Nietzsche, it is hardness against oneself that is expected to break pseudo-virtues that have solidified in ideology. In Luther, it is the suffering that the other person inflicts on me, indeed the suffering in place of the person which enables one to attend to the other with no reserve. So what we can draw from Luther and Nietzsche is an adumbration, or initial image of a critical virtue ethics, which cultivates self-relativization and openness. Critical virtue ethics propagates the ability of the subject to be called by the other and to question his own routines of thinking. Such culture of openness to the other and critical self-reflexivity would have to impregnate the striving for virtue on the whole. Honesty to oneself and empathy prove to be key virtues within

20. On Nietzsche and Luther, cf. Large (2003, 111–37, 127, 131), Higgins (2000, 110–122).

21. Cf. Martin Luther, WA 7, 560, 9f.

a critical virtue ethics,²² and both are required to prevent the manipulative and ideological misfiring of virtue that Luther, Kant and Nietzsche have all diagnosed. The contemporary critique of virtue ethics quite rightly observes that virtue can collapse into vice. Indeed there is a danger that virtue ethics overstrains people. But this does not mean that virtue ethics is to be abandoned altogether; rather, virtue ethics needs to be adapted critically. I would argue that for virtue ethics to be successful we must remain aware of how difficult it is to attain virtue, accept that we will frequently fail in our attempts, but continuing striving nonetheless.²³

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22. Cf. Appiah (2008).

23. Cf. Appiah (2008, 48f): "Acquiring virtue, Aristotle already knew, is hard; it is something that takes many years, and most people don't make it. These experiments [from moral psychology, J.S.] might confirm the suspicion that compassionate men and women are rare, in part because becoming passionate is difficult. But difficult is not the same as impossible; and perhaps one can ascend the gradient of these virtues only through aspiring to the full-fledged ideal."

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اخلاق فضیلت انتقادی

یوهان اشمیت*

از زمان چاپ مقاله معروف آنسکم با عنوان "فلسفه اخلاق معاصر"، اخلاق فضیلت در بین اندیشمندان بیشتر مورد توجه قرار گرفته است. دست کم چهار اشکال در مورد اخلاق فضیلت مطرح شده است؛ یکی از این اشکالات مربوط می‌شود به سلامت اخلاقی انسان‌ها. این مقاله محدودیت‌های اخلاق فضیلت را با توجه به ضعف فضیلتی انسان‌ها مورد بررسی قرار می‌دهد. پس از مقرر کردن اشکالات که از منظر اخلاق تجربی به اخلاق فضیلت وارد شده است، نویسنده بحث اخلاق فضیلت انتقادی را پیش می‌کشد و دیدگاه سه متفکر لوتری را، کانت، نیچه، و خود مارتین لوتر، در این خصوص مورد بررسی قرار می‌دهد. نویسنده نشان می‌دهد که نقد اخلاق فضیلت از سوی اخلاق تجربی شباهت زیادی با افکار لوتر، کانت، و نیچه در این باره دارد. و در پایان، وی به بحث در مورد آینده اخلاق فضیلت انتقادی می‌پردازد.

کلیدواژه‌ها: اخلاق فضیلت، اخلاق تجربی، ایمانوئل کانت، فردریش نیچه، مارتین لوتر.

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