The Inter-Processual Self:

Towards a Personalist Virtue Ethics Proposal for Human Agency

Kleio Akrivou, José Víctor Orón Semper and Germán Scalzo

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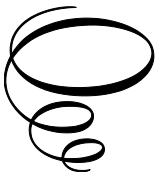

The Inter-Processual Self: Towards a Personalist Virtue Ethics Proposal for Human Agency

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FOREWORD

Academic life is composed of a large variety of scientific disciplines, each of which is cultivated by a scientific community. These communities behave, to some extent, like tribal societies with their own practices, standards, rites, and a more or less shared history about their forbearers and foundations. This is to be expected since science is the fruit of human endeavor and thrives in the desire to know, as well as in human beings' shared acquisition and essentially social nature. But this fact sometimes causes problems that affect the very goal of science, namely knowledge and understanding.

When it first emerged, science was a unique undertaking that Greek thinkers called philosophy. This was a very beautiful designation indeed, and highlights the fact that the search for truth and knowledge is worthwhile but difficult. It also shows that this undertaking affects human life as a kind of pathos that tends to configure personality. Even in its first instances, philosophy began to divide into different fields. Ethics and the study of human beings began to acquire their own characteristic traits that distinguish them from cosmology. Almost at the same time, the birth of mathematics represented a challenge to the unity of knowledge. It is true that mathematics is clearer than other branches of knowledge, but its connection to reality remains in question.

However, the division of knowledge reached a larger scale in modern and contemporary times. First, thanks to thinkers like Galileo and Newton, physics became a clear and distinct field of study with a methodology that reveals regularities in nature, making it a mechanism of prediction and control. This extraordinary success encouraged thinkers from other fields to try to achieve the same kind of success. In this process, they demarcated a field of study, then a methodology. New scientific communities emerged.

Establishing a shared methodology presented some risks, however. The idea that the application of a method and the accumulation of knowledge according to it inspires unlimited progress, and the fact that sometimes that progress does actually occur, frequently provoked the belief that the history of science is not at all important. In this view, we only need to know about our colleagues' most recent developments and discoveries, and then can carry on with our own inquiry.

This sometimes works well, at least to some extent, in very limited and specialized fields. But, in more complex and difficult fields, obviating history implies forgetting about the choices and presuppositions that make up a discipline and consequently the limitations entailed in the way we cultivate it at any given moment.

This difficulty has become more serious because of another process in the history of science. Philosophy has survived the fragmentation of knowledge, but has been left in a difficult state. As new scientific disciplines that claimed to be entirely serious, objective, and rigorous reclaimed different fields of reality, philosophy began to fall back on the unconquered territories that contain the most difficult and ultimate questions.

The impossibility of dealing with those questions in a "scientific" way has two different and opposing outcomes. Some philosophers declared that, since those questions cannot be answered with the scientific method, they are not at all attainable and, therefore, are a matter of mere preferences or irrational belief. They frequently hold that only the scientific method and the communities that cultivate it are capable of obtaining true knowledge. In this view, the role of science consists in the justification of this idea, the rejection of other research methods, and the clarification of the language of science. Other philosophers accept this demarcation, that is, that other, established scientific "tribes" already occupied some fields of reality, but they try to clearly demarcate philosophy's territory and develop special methods for distinguishing this activity from other intellectual practices.

Much of this work has been fruitful and it is not my intention to condemn modern science overall or recent developments in philosophy. But the situation that this process has created is, in my opinion, far from ideal. The isolation of philosophy can only end in making dialogue among disciplines more difficult and in obstructing a unified and organic vision of reality.

Science is, in fact, very different from the idealized scene of a set of sciences that occupies a well-delimited field of reality, the sum of whose knowledge supposedly expands our vision of the world. In fact, different disciplines frequently study the same realities and deal with not-so-different methods, but the fact is that scientists are often unable to converse or understand others' views on similar topics. This problematic situation often engenders reproaches and a kind of jealousy surfaces between experts; communication therein can become almost impossible.

Nevertheless, human beings cannot do without a vision of the world, so it is normal that our vision of the world is full of oversimplifications

from specialists that ignore the history and complexity of problems. As happens more and more frequently, the humility that a rigorous search for knowledge usually produces in good scientists can lead to skepticism and leave the work of dissemination to popular writers and journalists.

I am not rejecting the good work that those professionals and novices can do, but the fact is that scientists have abdicated their task, which has grave consequences for the whole of society.

For this reason, efforts like those that motivate this book must be welcome and should also be encouraged in other fields of research. In this case, the authors offer a diagnosis that inspires new approaches to the study of human action and psychological development, and they propose an alternative approach that aims to more accurately and more richly describe reality. Various features of this undertaking are worth mentioning.

This text is the fruit of dialogue between researchers of different disciplines and various scientific and cultural backgrounds. Their concern for a common topic has made their task and the enrichment of perspectives possible, and has produced a common understanding. This is clear proof that the effort to overcome disciplinary limitations can be fruitful.

As for the proposal, the authors of this work manage to offer not only a theoretical reflection on human beings, but also a model that can be tested and can orient future research and its application to different fields. In accordance with their backgrounds and interests, the authors explain the consequences of their proposal especially for the fields of education and management, but they also make clear its relevance for other fields, like psychological therapy.

I am impressed by their effort to understand the theoretical roots and presuppositions of the model that they want to surmount and, especially, of their proposed model. In this way, they show that science is a historical endeavor that, although it often tends to hide its intellectual roots, cannot be properly understood and pursued without understanding its intellectual origins and the decisions that have contributed to its cultivation and delimitation.

One especially noteworthy feature of the model that the authors propose corresponds to the fact that it aspires to be intercultural. In fact, modern science tends to overly depend on the Western tradition, although, as mentioned, it is frequently totally ignorant of that fact; yet, a globalized world obliges us to keep in mind other traditions and how they can enrich our perspective. If well done, this intercultural effort is very promising.

As the authors present the scholars on whose work their proposal is built, the reader cannot help but admire the variety of personalities

involved. Philosophers and psychologists that belong to different traditions are put together and the authors take advantage of different aspects of their works. This implies dialogue and mutual enrichment between philosophy and psychology, which should be more frequent.

From the beginning, I have witnessed the work that underlies this book. I have seen how it came about and how it has been developed in an intense and sometimes difficult common project. After reading the book, one is tempted to say that the proposal of the "inter-processual self" has already been tested in the very process of writing this text. And this is an extraordinary achievement. Indeed, openness to others, attention to the person, respect for human nature, and hard work are present in the writing of this book, which fittingly correspond to the different roots –or radicals– that are responsible for human life and behavior, and that the authors correctly order and promote.

I thank the authors, Kleio, José Víctor, and Germán, for the invitation to offer a prologue to their book, an invitation that I know was extended out of friendship and mutually shared interests. I have every expectation that the process of mutual enrichment that produced this book will continue, leading to developments that allow for its application and testing. It will surely produce fruitful debate about topics that all humans share and whose accurate study is decisive to our lives.

José Ignacio Murillo
Pamplona, December 26th, 2017

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

One word frees us of all the weight and pain of life: that word is love.
Sophocles

Each of us—Kleio, José Víctor, and Germán—met at a time of personal and intellectual seeking, inquiry, transition, and growth in our lives, and know that without each other our potential for growth would not have materialized. We, therefore, warmly acknowledge what each one of us has given and accepted in this process of co-creating, as well as the future research potential this proposal contains that will inevitably strengthen the present relationship and the future collaboration(s) involving the three of us and other colleagues. We also acknowledge how each other receives acts within this relationship congruently with an inter-processual self (IPS) way of knowing. Such giving–receiving relational mutuality has enabled continued personal growth in the process of "learning who we are and be(coming more fully) such," as Pindar, the early Greek naturalist thinker, brilliantly noted, echoing how we discuss the heart of our proposal in the fifth chapter of this book.

Moreover, we warmly appreciate how the personal trust and relation among us remains a safe space: one that allows us to debate, inquire, and act in such a way as to incubate ongoing attention to this work, which has finally been brought to life and to fruition. We hope readers like this work and its proposal and are intrigued to study it, practice it, and create other work based on it. Proposing a new singular voice in the hope that it will be part of other good existing research in the cross-disciplinary domain of virtue ethics and action research is neither an easy nor a quick and safe choice. But its purpose is worthwhile, and mutual support has been the oxygen in the effort of fostering dialogue that aims to restore a humane and ecologically sensitive economy and society. The kind of action we theoretically describe to this common good adheres to free and open system and ethics in relations of mutual growth. Essentially this personalist virtue ethics proposal (IPS) restores humanheartedness, sincerity and benevolence at the core of human action and collaboration.

For somehow this is tyranny's disease, to trust no friends.
Aeschylus

Additionally, we acknowledge and reflect on how our project and proposal may come to challenge hubris. We therefore also recognize the challenge that this personalist virtue ethics proposal we offer may pose to other systems of thought promoting mindsets that engage in sacrificing the flourishing of some to an abstract notion of a service to a greater good or a belief in post-humanism as a newly created "normal". This same challenge is posed to other systems of thought; systems which seek some normative justification for despotism's and totalitarianism's projects to master human freedom and openness; or, systems which promote a version of freedom based upon an excessively individualistic thinking regarding how the common good is reachable in life. We are opposed to such proposals that idolize or seriously crush the singularity and fear difference (in cognitive or actual terms) as threats instead of valuing them as possibilities and a manifestation of our wealth of spirit and nature. We trust the IPS proposal provides normative and some descriptive guidance on how to face what is fearful, sad and dehumanizing, however tricky it is for human action to live up to this proposal in our daily life and personal–social relations.

We wish to heartily thank all who believed in us and in this project and celebrate its fruition with us. We also acknowledge our friends and colleagues more broadly who support(ed) us in giving life to this work and/or trusted us in sharing a way of imagining how this new proposal can contribute to the broader dialogue and discourse bridging moral psychology and virtue ethics and applied in educational, organizational and governance theories.

> *Great deeds give choice of many tales. Choose a slight tale, enrich it large, and then let wise men listen.*
>
> Pindar

Our contribution of this new personalist virtue ethics proposal on the self, action, and human development (the so-called *inter-processual self* or IPS) has drawn its core argument, structure, and insights from the history of knowledge (see Appendix). This allows our own theoretical original contribution to the social sciences and human development theories to claim one specific cross-disciplinary rooting. We do therefore feel this is a "small and specific" research proposal even if it appears large due to its effort to create connections across disciplines and time via its theoretical rootedness in the history of knowledge we offer in our book's Appendix. This sense of making a specific contribution enables us to authentically and genuinely feel an integral part of the ethical dialoguing that is a characteristic of academia; and to remain connected and part of the struggles of each and all academic colleagues for a space and voice in their

effort searching for (more) truthful answers to imminent and important challenges, while maintaining their academic integrity and self-respect.

As noted by Professor Murillo in the Foreword, a unity of knowledge that Greek thinkers called philosophy evolved as a division of disciplines that suffered hugely from further fragmentations and subdivisions during the twentieth century; this unity of knowledge was in fact a unity in knowledge and in action with a humanistic ethic with a purposeful orientation to "the good." Our book simply acknowledges the huge loss of understanding and (practical) wisdom that brings many disciplines and life more broadly further away from a sense of what is the essence of being and acting as a human person with an orientation to the good. We therefore acknowledge how other colleagues around various existing formal disciplinary boundaries (and guided by things we were educated and socialized to take for granted in modern thought and fear to inquire, or costs to our professional and personal lives could ensue) have been dedicating their lives in passionate work to resolve problems of self, and action with maturity, and an ethos of responsibility, respect for other(s) as opposed to a striving for mastery and domination and an ecological ethos and sensitivity. We therefore also respect and acknowledge colleagues in various fields of study (normative and applied ethics, human development, social science, and philosophy more broadly) who deal with the same problems, even those we classify as theories with which we disagree, and ideas we think of as hugely influential, but which we do not classify in this volume for reasons explained. Many of you are or have been our friends, teachers, colleagues, and people we know as mentors and/or reviewers and who practice social and government and broader policy and action. Sincerely, therefore, we wish to acknowledge our being part of this broader community in our profession, and our bonds to all of you.

And this brings us to this: we wholeheartedly thank Professor José Ignacio Murillo, who kindly dedicated thought and time for his thorough peer review of the volume. We thank him for his kind scholarly contribution to our effort, via his foreword. Beside the thoughtful and wise words he wrote to prepare readers how to read and understand this work and its roots of inquiry and action, we appreciate this contribution for the uniqueness of its creator: Professor Murillo combines a rare pluri-disciplinary expertise spanning from classical to modern and contemporary philosophy and history of philosophy, cognitive science, as well as behavioral and moral psychology fields of study, while he maintains a virtue ethics academic focus. We find this background important for it balances and expresses with craftsmanship, eloquence,

simplicity, and character ethos the academic "distance–closeness duality" that is required for a foreword to a colleague's work.

We thank Christa Byker, Felicity Teague, as well as Sophie Edmonson, Hannah Fletcher, Adam Rummins -and the design, typesetting and print services teams- in *Cambridge Scholars Publishing* for the help in copyediting, for making our ideas stylistically clearer and for helping us to finish off this book so nicely. Your collaboration in making our work enjoyable to read is much appreciated with sincere thanks.

As a final comment, we believe our contribution to a better understanding of the self is part of a larger effort in recent years following many unexpected economic, social, moral, and humanistic crises in the so-called "developed" world.

It is terrible to speak well and be wrong.

Sophocles

Crises often offer opportunities to examine ourselves, and to inquire after what is lacking, or what is not really working, investigating how to sincerely reexamine the status quo especially in how established ways of thinking, knowing, and acting can be re-imagined. This requires personal, relational, and systemic action regarding how to approach choices and the process of acting personally and in collaboration with others in various communities of practice. irrespective of who and if our action is being monitored or "managed-regulated" from outside systems. Our book offers a proposal of moral psychology approached through theory of knowledge and its history. Our proposal on knowing and acting approaches action and valuing as something that demands personal and relational inquiry and a sincere concern for honest responses that are integral to identity and our moral feelings and not just a detached rational judgment capacity. This is a delicate process, therefore, that binds how to be a good person, how to love, and how to act well facing one's and others' responses. The proposal we offer in this book does not adopt the assumption that being human confers absolute freedom and authority to each of us to autonomously construct each one's subjective good. Nor is it tied to a notion of the ethical that undermines the importance of personal and shared responsibility (irrespectively of the extent to which our action is being monitored or "managed–regulated" from outside systems or superior authority) and the notion that goodness and living well is possible independently of the choices each one of us is making approaching our relations and action in our identities, relations, and communities.

> *Seek not, my psyche (soul), the life of the immortals; but enjoy to the full the resources that are within thy reach.*
>
> Pindar

Within this context, we hope this book and its proposal contribute to a broader dialogue and actual good progress and solutions. We are motivated to contribute "our voice" and join other voices that genuinely care about restoring a sustainable, humanistic, and ecological ethos. We believe such broader voices are shared among academic communities, educators, and non-academic communities (policy makers, sustainability and personal development and ethics consultancy and bodies, governments and non-profit or non-governmental international transnational or local organizations, local administration, civil society, etc.), who, as citizens in communities, jointly inquire after how to make a better life ethos and practice possible across various spheres.

With full hearts and minds,

Kleio, José Víctor, and Germán
from the United Kingdom, Spain, and Mexico

January 2018