Virtue and Utopia

Benjamin Franks' "Anarchism and the Virtues,"
in *Anarchism and Moral Philosophy*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010,
reviewed by Andy Blunden.

In his elaboration of 'practical anarchism' ('practical' as in 'practical philosophy', i.e., ethical), Franks draws extensively on Alasdair MacIntyre's virtue ethics, especially as set out in *After Virtue* (1981), and proposes that:

> "anarchism ... and its distinguishing characteristic of adherence to *prefigurative* tactics ... is best considered as a social virtue theory compatible with the format developed by MacIntyre." (p. 156)

I am not an anarchist, but I am interested in the prospects for a united and effective Left, and I think Franks' proposal to found anti-capitalist politics on virtue ethics has much to offer.

Franks accepts MacIntyre's concept of 'practices' which is close to what I call 'collaborative projects'. In particular:

> "like MacIntyre, they [anarchists] view the social world as being constructed out of intersecting social practices." (p. 141)

MacIntyre defines a 'practice' as:

> "any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity." (1981, 175)

and he goes on to gives examples: games like chess or football, professions such as architecture, enquiries such as physics, chemistry or history, arts such as painting and music, and the creation and sustaining of households, cities and nations. All practices are aimed at the achievement of some good.

And a virtue is defined as:

> "an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices." (p. 178)

So virtue is *relative* to the practice in which it is utilized. No human quality is *absolutely* virtuous, at least for the foreseeable future.

Practices, as MacIntyre sees it, are components of a *tradition*. A tradition is "an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute a tradition" (p. 207).

Internal Goods

Participants in a practice are striving for some *good* which is intrinsic to that practice; they may be motivated to do so by *external* goods. The distinction between goods internal to a practice and goods external to the practice is crucial. The successful solution of a difficult problem in medical science is an example of an internal good, and the scientist achieving it will feel good about it, whilst winning the Nobel Prize is an external good. In both cases, the participant may experience pleasure, but only in the case of the internal good does the community as a whole receive a benefit. Practices

arise in response to some problem (or opportunity) with the formation of a concept of the problematic situation, the realization of which is the end at which the practice aims. This concept undergoes development as people learn from the experience of trying to realize it. The enjoyment (and fame) arising from the successful practice of medicine, (which is the well-being of patients), for example, is not the end at which medicine aims. Rather this enjoyment *supervenes* upon the successful activity (1981, p. 184), that is, it is a by-product of pursuing the good of the practice. The good at which the practice is directed is definitive of the practice even though both the practice and its aim change over time, the practice maintains a narrative unity as it undergoes historical development and both its ends and its means change.

What about if the project concerned is to bring about radical social change of some kind, rather than simply the perfection of the practice itself? This is problematic because the aim – abolition of capitalism – is, by its nature, *remote*. Pursuit of radical change is not the same as sustaining and maintaining a community and incrementally improving it, which is the kind of practice that MacIntyre seems to have in mind. Pursuing the overthrow of existing social conditions is not the same as improving life under capitalism.

For an action within a practice of radical social change to be judged successful presupposes a *social theory* by means of which the contribution of an action, *if successful*, to the achievement of that end may be assessed as an 'internal good' which the participants are striving for . We are not going to witness the overthrow of capitalism as the outcome of our action, but some step in that direction would mark the success of an action, and social change activities are always aimed at some step of that kind. A social change activity which is *not* aimed at taking some small step towards achieving the ideal which motivates it, may be a game or a fantasy of some kind, but it is not social change activism. It is the argument about what is or is not a step towards socialism which constitutes the tradition to which anarchists and socialists belong. Franks' answer to this problem is the notion of *prefiguration*. I will return to this later.

MacIntyre distinguishes between institutions and practices. Institutions, he says, are concerned with external goods, so as to sustain themselves and the practices of which they are the bearers – good performances are rewarded, and wages are paid for full-time commitment and apprentices are given formal training by old hands. Education systems based on testing regimes are an example of how institutions can undermine the very virtues that they set out to sustain. "For no practices can survive for any length of time unsustained by institutions … institutions and practices form a single causal order in which which the creativity of the practice are always vulnerable to the acquisitiveness of the institution …without the virtues … practices could not resist the corrupting power of institutions" (p. 181). Elsewhere (2014), I have argued that collaborative projects (practices) rather than individuals or groups should be taken as the units of analysis for social theory, and that institutions be seen simply as part of the life cycle of projects. Given the antipathy anarchists tend to manifest towards institutions, MacIntyre's claim that they are necessary to sustain practices is an issue which Franks could address. (See my review of Andrew Jamison, Blunden 2012). As Franks would agree, surely there are institutions which sustain virtues without undermining them at the same time by rewarding performance, and aren't they exactly the kind of institutions we aspire to create? Without institutionalization, how are the practices to be sustained and the virtues fostered and maintained?

In the early days of working class organization, breaches of union discipline were punished with fines; gradually, over a period of 100 years, these sanctions faded away as the norms of unionism were internalized by workers and new generations raised in the necessary virtues. No-one would argue that these fines exercised a "corrupting power," but the point is that the virtue of solidarity took a protracted period of time to become instilled in the broad mass of the working class and where unions are still strong, is still maintained this day by means of other sanctions. *How* this virtue became instilled and maintained in masses of people is a question of great interest for us.

So where does anarchism, and 'practical anarchism' in particular, fit in this scheme? The various currents of activity which co-existed in the First International and later manifested themselves in the various currents of anarchism and socialism constitute a single tradition, and accordingly have been engaged in arguments about the nature and means of achieving Socialism for the past 150 years and more. Anarchism and Communism emerged as separate currents only in the early 1870s. Each of the various currents are *practices*, and it is the continual interaction between and immanent self-critique within these practices, all part of the same anti-capitalist tradition, which makes possible not only collaboration, but which brings about change and development within each of these practices. As the movement experiences its failures and successes, the vision of the ends being pursued changes, as does the conception of appropriate means.

Problems with MacIntyre's virtue ethics

Modeling an anti-capitalist project on MacIntyre's virtue ethics cannot ignore the fact that MacIntyre himself regarded modernity *in toto* as an unmitigated disaster and the conclusion he drew for himself was a return to the Catholic Church and obedience to its tradition. No wonder that MacIntyre did not turn his mind to the anti-capitalist project at this time. James Laidlaw (2013) has made a sharp critique of MacIntyre, but I think that Franks' selective appropriation of the MacIntyre of *After Virtue* is not affected by the problems which Laidlaw identifies and even Laidlaw can see a "vague anarcho-syndicalist utopianism" in *After Virtue*. There is no need to accept MacIntyre's analysis of the failure of the Enlightenment project in order to adopt the idea of a world made up of practices and traditions of practice sustained by virtues oriented to the furtherance of goods internal to practices. This is the feature of MacIntyre's virtue ethics which makes it attractive for those of us engaged in social change activism.

Franks sees two challenges to the adoption of MacIntyre's virtue ethics: (1) "MacIntyre's view that the virtues require a consistent adherence to strict social regulation," and (2) "the biologically determined teleology that is the basis for MacIntyre's description of Aristotle's account of the virtues" (p. 151). (1) he finds to be not problematic on the basis that the tradition of which anarchists are a part supports strong social norms, but simply opposes their enforcement by a state or by capital. Whatever MacIntyre's view, it is now at least widely accepted that civil disobedience is a major contributor to social progress – Rawls (1993) and Heller (1987) who are deontologists, both affirm this, and civil disobedience is an exceptionally important arena for the development of virtues. There could no justification for "consistent adherence to strict social regulation" as a criterion of virtue, in our times at least.

(2) turns out to not be a problem either; a virtue is that which promotes the achievement of the goods which constitute the defining telos of the practice and MacIntyre says that the definition of virtues "does not entail or imply that practices as actually carried through at particular times and places do not stand in need of moral criticism" (p. 187).

Indeed it is by means of the moral criticisms which take place through the interaction between practices within a tradition, "as components of a shared unifying narrative," (p. 155) that practices are "judged." Every practice has a telos, by definition (an aimless practice is a contradiction in terms), but a telos which is forever under revision. There is no requirement in virtue ethics, however, for "essentialism" or an "unchanging human nature," something which Franks seems unduly concerned about. The virtue of the practice is guaranteed only by reference to the tradition of which it is a part, ultimately, according to Aristotle, on the basis that "the good life for man is spent seeking the good life for man" (MacIntyre, p. 204).

I agree with Franks' turn to *virtue* ethics and his rejection of the two viable alternative theories of ethics, viz., Consequentialism and Deontology. Note however that the dispute is over which criterion should be the *final arbiter* of right and wrong and whether the right thing to do can really ever be decided by reference to an abstract rule.

Consequentialism and Deontology

According to Consequentialism, the rightness of an act must be judged according to its consequences. There are two difficulties with this: (1) at the time of acting you do not know what could be the consequences of your action beyond the proximate outcome, if at all, and (2) how are all the myriad of outcomes, good and bad to be aggregated? The most established version of Consequentialism, Utilitarianism, answers that the total utility (usually interpreted in economic terms) summed across all affected persons must be maximized. Apart from the implausibility of this calculation, it leads to perverse and unjust outcomes.

However, the rejection of Consequentialism does not mean that a person should be indifferent to the consequences of their action, as Franks seems to be suggesting when he says, with reference to prefigurative methods: "the employment of such methods is not justified consequentially." On the contrary, a person is morally responsible for the foreseeable consequences of their action and in the case of reckless action, even unforeseeable consequences. An aimless action is not only madness, it is a contradiction in terms.

According to Deontology, the rightness of an act must be judged by its conformity to a set of rules of the form "Thou shalt …" Foremost amongst these rules is the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have done unto you," and in modern Communicative Ethics (Habermas 1984, 1987), decisions about how to act must be made according to rules governing how *collective* decisions are made: consulting all those affected, benefiting the most disadvantaged, eschewing domineering or exclusionary speech, etc.

The rejection of Deontology does not mean that there are no rules which people ought to have a mind to in deciding how to act; on the contrary, the rules just mentioned by way of illustration most certainly should be attended to in deciding how to act. But *which* rule should one obey when two or more rules are in conflict, and mandate different actions?

Virtue Ethics

The point is that reflecting against abstract and implausible criteria while carrying out elaborate hypothetical calculations is just not how people actually make decisions. This is not surprising because it would be actually impossible to make decisions in that way and attempts to do so invariably lead to perverse outcomes. It is when two or more rules

conflict and we are called upon to decide *which* rule to prioritize or have to find a creative *via media* that ethics comes into play at all, and neither consequentialism nor deontology can help us when facing these kind of quandaries. The richness of the vocabulary for virtues and vices – prudence, courage, self-respect, humility, intelligence, intuition, firmness, kindness, fairness, empathy, flexibility, consistency, …. versus carelessness, cowardice, hubris, insensitivity, … – evidences the complexity of the process of determining one's course of action in difficult situations and the depth of personal character that is called upon to act wisely. For correct decisions we must rely upon the judgment of a person in command of the relevant virtues and is in possession of all the facts. This is why we have judges and juries and we do not simply appoint a clerk to look up the relevant legal provision and read off the verdict. It always requires *judgment*, and the virtues needed to make a good judgment and carry it through can only be acquired through a moral education in the relevant tradition. Aristotle called the wisdom entailed in knowing how to act in the face of complex and conflicting imperatives *phronesis*.

In exercising phronesis, a judge, for example, takes into account foreseeable consequences and the possible unforeseeable consequences of their decision, and attends to rules of conduct which ensure justice and fairness in acting. Judges are subject to a protracted education and training in the practice of the law in order to instill the appropriate virtues and develop the capacity for phronesis. *There is no rulebook* for this. But in every case, this judgment entails an indefinitely complex balancing which can never be definitively resolved by rules or a utilitarian calculus. It is the tradition of which the practice is a part and the self-concept of that practice itself which provides the resources for the exercise of phronesis, the various rules of conduct, concepts and narratives which the judge can call upon in determining what to do. And there is no substitute, no abstract set of procedural rules or decision guidelines which can substitute for the exercise of phronesis by virtuous actors, determining their action as participants along with others in the relevant practice.

It is virtue ethics therefore that offers a *realistic study* of the exercise of phronesis, but virtue ethics does not exclude the need for deontological and consequential considerations, but on the contrary attends realistically to their application.

Practical Anarchism and Virtue Ethics

Franks repeatedly emphasizes that 'practical anarchism' rejects consequentialism, for example:

> "Anarchist prefigurative methods are identifiable as they are the types of practices that would collectively build up to create their anti-hierarchical version of the flourishing society. However, the employment of such methods is not justified consequentially. Anarchists, for instance, employ anti-hierarchical forms of social interaction (for instance, in their formal methods of organisation) not because they will bring about their ends more quickly than centralised authoritarian political structures, but because they produce the very forms of social relationship, albeit in miniature, that they hope to achieve in the longer term." (p. 146)

The qualification "more quickly" is a red-herring. The argument about the merits of anarchist practices is not over how *quickly* Socialism can be attained. If Franks is saying anything at all, he is saying that the employment of anti-hierarchical methods will bring

about socialism and the employment of hierarchical structures *cannot*, otherwise the whole argument is moot. How is this to happen?

Franks says that these practices will "collectively build up to create their anti-hierarchical version of the flourishing society … albeit in miniature." Now this is not an ethical argument, it is a *social theory*, viz., the theory that by creating a better world in miniature, a transformation of the entire world may be achieved by "contamination," to use the term coined by Maeckelbergh (2009). The general assembly, it seems, can "build up" to a larger and larger meeting until the entire world is drawn into its anti-hierarchical structure, without the use of delegates or representatives (which anarchists deem to be inherently hierarchical). Franks does not promote the use of the word 'contamination' but he does believe that practice of the virtues is 'generative', that is, that practice of the virtues promotes the formation of a virtuous character, and it is more than reasonable to suppose that virtuous practices will serve to generate further such practices. But the fact is that we have not seen the evidence of this in growing numbers of anarchists and socialists in the world. If this is to happen by some kind of moral education, then we need a theory about how this is achieved. It is not automatic.

Although embedded in an exposition of MacIntyre's virtue ethics, the proposal for prefigurative politics is in fact *not an ethical argument* at all, but an expression of a highly questionable, unproven social theory, that of *contamination* – simple force of example.

But let us look more closely. Franks argues that prefigurative politics are adopted *not for consequential reasons*. So for example, if a non-hierarchical structure is adopted for a campaign and as a consequence of this structure, let us say, an important decision is not made in a timely manner, and the campaign fails (the forest is burnt, the refugees remain in detention, the houses are demolished or whatever) then the argument is that still it was right to adopt the non-hierarchical structure, despite it being the *cause* of the failure of the campaign. Now I have to say that there are most definitely circumstances in which it would be correct to eschew a tactic despite the fact that it may be the only way to produce the desired outcome. But in general, it is fair to say that the process of contamination is unlikely to be effective in spreading non-hierarchical structures if a non-hierarchical structure consistently leads to the failure of a campaign.

Also, to employ a method without seeking to justify it consequentially *in order to* achieve Socialism by means of 'contamination' is a performative contradiction.

The question which confronts the activist is whether the need to achieve the proximate aim(s) of the campaign is *genuinely* in conflict with the need for a 'horizontalist' organization. If, for example, a group of workers are engaged in a campaign for a wage increase and a union official is able to convince the boss to grant the increase by spending the day on the golf course with him and making a secret deal, I would say that such a means is corrupt and not justified by the end because of the negative impact it has on union organization, loss of trust, etc. But Consensus, for example, is not the only way of resolving differences in a campaign and sometimes such debates are *not* the best way of resolving differences. Knowing the best way to resolve differences in a campaign requires the exercise of phronesis, a capacity that is acquired through long experience in organizing and willingness at all times to learn from experience and eschew dogma, and to know when to adopt one means of overcoming differences and when to adopt another.

The point is that the consequences of (for example) adopting a certain structure *are* significant in deciding whether to utilize it, but it takes judgment. One ought to know the proximate outcome of a decision one makes – for example, that the adoption of a 'horizontalist' structure for a campaign will lead to failure of the campaign, and this has to be taken into account and *weighed*. But the tradition of which one is a part and the self-concept of the practice, which includes its social theory, provide the concepts, rules and inferences which will also guide you in making a decision – whether or not to let the campaign fail in the interests of (for example) preserving relationships within the campaign and being able to learn from a failure. To adopt virtue ethics is not to turn a blind eye to the proximate consequences of one's actions and certainly not to ignore the wisdom accumulated by the anti-capitalist movement over the past two hundred years, encoded in the founding principles of the First International and the socialist and anarchist literature produced by the movement since. It is to know how to apply it.

Making a virtue ethic the basis for an approach to social change activism means paying attention to cultivating the capacity for ethical judgment, phronesis, among the activists and building organizations which are themselves virtuous, and not captive to rigid dogmas and procedural imperatives (deontology).

Goals and Motives

I have said that one knows, or ought to know, the proximate outcome of one's decisions, and an organization bears moral responsibility for those outcomes and other unintended outcomes insofar as they were foreseeable. But socialist society is never such an outcome. On any judgment, socialist society is generations into the future. No course of action can be judged consequentially on the basis that its outcome will be socialist society. Only a raving idiot could believe that, the more so in the light of the experience of the twentieth century.

An action has effects; these effects combine with the totality of conditions at the time and the responses of all the players to produce a new totality of conditions. One can never know the ultimate consequences of one's action. However, history *is* intelligible and the socialist and anarchist traditions have built up a body of social theory over the past two hundred years which provides rules of conduct and some capacity to analyze conditions and estimate the consequences of different conditions and events. There is always going to be room for argument about how this struggle may unfold, and most likely this argument will be settled only in some distant time when people are more intelligent than we are now. What Ethics can provide however is that which social theory cannot: guidance on how to work together when we do not agree about the efficacy of this or that decision. It is here I believe that Franks' proposal for a politics based on virtue ethics comes into play.

Ethics and Utopia

If prefigurative politics is to be justified, it has to be on the basis of virtue ethics, but this does *not* imply that this or that organizational structure is validated *irrespective of consequences*. 'Socialist Society' – the utopian vision we share of a future world after the overthrow of capital – is not a 'consequence'. This is because it is absolutely impossible to predict the arrival of such a society generations into the future, as a result of not just *our* actions, but those of everyone else. 'Consequences' are the proximate and foreseeable outcomes of decisions made and it is these we must take moral responsibility for.

‘Socialist society’ is a rendering of the ethics of socialism into utopian form. It is *this*, our *socialist ethics*, which determines our actions along with the social theory which we have also acquired through the practices of the anti-capitalist tradition. Our socialist ethics must be, as Franks argues, a virtue ethics, which means we pay attention to the moral education of our cadres so that they will be able to exercise wise judgment in the struggle for justice and freedom. It is a fact that there are many differences in matters of social theory within our movement, despite the fact that we share a common vision of socialism, but there is surely reason to believe that we could share an ethic.

From whence does a socialist ethic arise? Not by transplanting a utopian vision of socialist society into the present, in ‘miniature’. No. It is more the other way around: the utopian vision of socialist society is a projection of our (somewhat) shared socialist ethic on to a future world. This socialist ethic exists and develops precisely in and through the practices in which we all *collaborate* together (cooperating and conflicting) and work through our differences, make our mistakes and share our successes and failures, together. If Maeckelbergh’s idea of ‘reciprocal contamination’ means anything it must mean the negotiation and internalization of shared ethics in the course of collaborating in common projects. If this is the case, then it would be very useful to try to elaborate this socialist ethics.

This is a very important and concrete task, because as Franks notes, there will never come a time when all conflicts have been resolved. To moderate the differences *within* the anti-capitalist movement is surely the most attractive way to develop the ethics of socialist society in which an even wider range of aspirations will exist.

In fact, the mere posing of socialist society as an *end* is misconceived. It is not a question of bringing means and ends into conformity at all, and any attempt to do so can only lead to a barren utopianism by subordinating our means, that is, our organizing practices of today, to an absolutely imaginary utopia – a world in which the socialist ethic has been universalized. In fact, when I do this, what is actually happening is that:

> I begin with my spontaneously adopted ethics;
> I then project them on to a future society, and
> I then deduce the ethics with which I actually began, but now with the illusory justification that it prefigures our shared end, socialist society.

In other words, it is a fraud.

No, the socialist ethic has to be justified in terms of the exigencies of organizing here and now, in the light of the wisdom we have inherited from our shared tradition. ‘Socialist society’ has no determinate content other than the generalization of the socialist ethic. But the socialist ethic is not something for the future: it is now. The means of our activity, including the consciousness of our activists, are in fact elements of the capitalist society of which we are a part and which is the very object which we are trying to change. This is where the identity of means and ends is located, in the subjectivity of the social strata which are thrown into opposition by the development of capitalism itself.

The social structures and forms in which the socialist ethic might be universalized must remain utterly obscure to us for some time. Franks claims (p. 141) that anarchism lacks “determinate ends” and surely this must be true for all of us in this tradition.

But it is unclear what Franks refers to when he counterposes this indeterminate end to “our goals.” His definition of prefiguration as “tactics [which] encapsulate the values

desired in [our] preferred goals," comes close to what I am arguing. But virtues are not goals and what are the "values" which have now been introduced? If we are introducing an axiology into MacIntyre's virtue ethics, rather than the deontology of which 'values' are usually a part, this needs to be explained. 'Goal' is usually used to denote proximate aims, in contrast to more remote 'ends' which Franks "hopes to achieve in the end" by means of prefiguration (p. 146). The meaning of these terms is not fixed, but in the context of talking about acting without concern for the consequences but hoping to achieve something "in the end," this all needs clarification.

I shall elaborate an approach to resolving this question by means of an innovation in virtue ethics which marks a departure from the concept of virtue used hitherto.

Virtues and Practices

The traditional concept of "virtue" is intrinsically individuated in content, in that it references an aspect of an individual's character. On the other hand, an aspect of an individual's character is only a virtue if its exercise contributes to the internal goods of the practice of which it is a part, and what counts as the social good is determined by the social practice and the tradition of which it is a part. Further, character is itself shaped by participation in practices even though the character is itself a psychological formation. Virtue is thus both practical (social) and psychological in content.

This ambiguity is not unique to the concept of virtue. It would be mistaken to take knowledge, for example, as a psychological entity, even though knowledge can only be realized in the conscious activity of individuals. But what counts as knowledge depends on the practice in which it is realized, and individuals in general acquire knowledge through practical interaction with the institutions and cultural artifacts of a practice. In a similar vein, customs are taken to be attributes of a community, conformity to which is acquired by individuals in the individual's habits and conduct.

I believe it is justified to take virtue (like knowledge and custom) as in the first place *a property of a social formation* or project, and only *derivatively* a property of an individual's character. What is taken to be virtuous in a given practice is realized by individuals acquiring the virtue through participation in a practice which values and exhibits that virtue. Like custom and knowledge, virtues should be understood primarily as attributes of a practice, realized and manifested in the activities of the practice and *derivatively* as something acquired by individual human beings in and through their participation in the practice, according to the quality of their participation and position in that practice. We are all familiar with the inclusive social movement, the competitive sports club, the supportive self-help club, the solid union or the egalitarian community.

The starting point of the enquiry then is to determine those virtues which we see as characterizing anti-capitalist politics and how they are fostered by the practices which make up our tradition. This conception of *virtuous* political activities is our starting point, and it is reasonable to suppose, at least to start with, that individuals will acquire the virtues by participating in virtuous political practices. Surely also, taking everything into account, the best possible outcome will result from the exercise of those virtues, if not some utopia.

So this moves the discussion to the *virtues of social practices* ('collaborative projects' in my terminology), over and above the usual vocabulary of individuated virtues. As MacIntyre pointed out, the study of the virtues is fundamentally an *empirical exercise*,

not an abstract theoretical speculation, and the necessary empirical data is summarized in my book "The Origins of Collective Decision Making."

Social change practices are underpinned, however, by the deontological maxim: *we* decide what *we* do. This is the progressive, secular version of the Golden Rule. The virtues of social change activism are developed on the basis of this maxim and the resolution of conflicts which arise in the course of collective decision making. It is these virtues which *prefigure* the kind of world we are fighting for, not 'in miniature' but concretely, in reality, here and now.

In the first part of what follows I will discuss the ethics of relations between projects in terms of four paradigmatic types of interaction, viz., mutuality, solidarity, philanthropy and collaboration. In the second part I consider three paradigmatic types of project, viz., Counsel, Majority and Consensus.

The Ethics of interactions between projects[1]

If there is no interaction between projects, then no ethical questions arise between them. We take the interaction between two distinct projects under the concept of how one project *contributes to* another project whilst retaining its own identity, its conception of its own end. There are four such modes of contribution: mutuality, solidarity, philanthropy and collaboration.

Mutuality or Exchange between projects

This mode, 'exchange', is the most common relation between projects found in modern societies. It entails each doing something for the other, within finite limits, on the basis of mutuality, either explicitly or implicitly involving a contract. Decisions about cooperation are made by bargaining or negotiation, to arrive at an exchange of values which allows each project to further their own end. It is a relationship of mutual instrumentalisation. Typical instances are everyday purchase-and-sales, wage labor, commercial contracts or treaties, agreements between nation-states or other groups.

From an ethical standpoint, the essential relation is that each treats the other as an autonomous agent and bargains in good faith (*honesty*) without exploiting the other. It is based on mutual *recognition* and respect. The two projects retain their autonomy relative to one another whilst contributing to the others' end by action or payment, because by doing so it furthers their own end. What each does with the other is *negotiated*.

Mutuality fosters the development of *autonomy* among subjects who gain recognition from others by virtue of the fact that they can do something which meets the needs of another such subject. The relation of mutuality, or exchange, is institutionalized in the market; the proletariat itself emerged from the marketization of labor and the struggle against the atomizing logic of the market. Mutual aid may develop, through alliances which have a shared aim, towards full collaboration.

Solidarity with another project

"Solidarity"[2] entered the English language from the French at the Chartist Convention in London in April 1848 and was popularised by *The People's Paper*, the paper of

[1] The material in the section is more fully elaborated in *Collaborative Projects. An Interdisciplinary Study*, 2014.

Ernest Jones and Julian Harney. The 1864 Rules of International Workingmen's Association began with the maxim: "the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves," and went on to say that all efforts at the emancipation of the working class had hitherto failed for want of *solidarity*. These two principles: self-emancipation of the oppressed and solidarity, together make the irreducible and inseparable foundations of the anti-capitalist movement.

Solidarity is where the subject (i.e., the project lending support to the other) subordinates itself to the other and acts under its direction in order to assist the other in regaining normality and autonomy. The subject is not in danger of losing its autonomy by subordinating itself to the other pro tem; on the contrary, it can expect to strengthen its own subjectivity. *Trust* is a precondition for solidarity and solidarity builds trust.

It may well be the case that the subject sees long term advantage for itself in offering solidarity, but that is beside the point, because it gives support by subordinating itself to the other's subjectivity; it does not *use* the other or 'take it over'.

Philanthropy (or Colonization) of another project

Philanthropy is where the subject subsumes the other project into itself, 'colonizes' it, either to further its own ends, or because the other is in dire need and the subject aims to 'rescue' it. In either case, the autonomy and subjectivity of the other project is extinguished, but by becoming pro tem a part of another project, they may achieve conditions of normality and may later be able to emancipate themselves and restore their autonomy. In general, this relation is inconsistent with socialist ethics which mandates solidarity, but in extreme circumstances it may be necessary. The other project could be an individual.

Note that while colonization may lead to the extinguishment of the colonized project, this in no way suggests the *persons* engaged in that project are destroyed. On the contrary, they are recruited into a new, stronger project.

From an ethical standpoint, since the subject takes moral responsibility for the relationship, so the ethical relationship is one of *care* and responsibility. They do not treat the other as autonomous and equal, but do take on responsibility for the other's welfare as for their own, and according to their own lights.

Collaboration between projects, as such

All the above are limiting forms of collaboration, but *normative* collaboration is where the projects enter into one of the *collective decision making* relationship dealt with below either through delegates or altogether. Such a collaboration forms a collaborative project in its own right. Here the projects cooperate and conflict over the means to be adopted and how the end is to be achieved, but share the end as part of their own self-consciousness. There is no bargaining, because everyone is committed to the same end. Normative collaboration is marked by a move towards full participation in decision making and the sharing of blame and credit for outcomes. Collaboration builds *trust* and *understanding*, and ultimately, may allow projects to merge into one another, abandoning their separate structures.

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[2] The origins and nature of solidarity between organisations is outlined in my essay Solidarity and solidarity as the relation between individuals in the same project is discussed below and at more length in my book *Origins of Collective Decision Making* (2016).

The Ethics of Collaboration, within Projects

Within all projects, the maxim of 'What *we* do, *we* decide' applies, but *how* we decide varies distinctly. The ethical shape of a project is manifested in its mode of collective decision making. Aside from Sortition (drawing lots, etc.), there are just three paradigmatic modes of collective decision making, each of which has a quite distinct social basis and history. While hybrids and ambiguities do exist, the sharpness of the distinctions and the deep ethical differences is striking. Every project has quite distinct decision making norms and the ethics of a project flow from the applicable paradigm. Norms will differ from project to project, but the ethical foundations upon which decision making rest are very consistent.

Counsel

The most ancient paradigm of collective decision making is Counsel. Counsel pre-dates medieval times and was documented by St. Benedict (c. 500 AD) and in African traditional societies under the name of Lekgotla. In Counsel, one person, the 'Chief' let us say, takes moral responsibility for making the decision, but is obliged to consult every one of the collective before announcing the decision. Counsel is still the dominant form of decision making in private firms and traditional families and is often the de facto form of decision making even where the procedures characteristic of Majority or Consensus are acted out. Counsel also applies to artistic projects, such as when a sculptor engages a technician to make castings, and so on, to the extent that Counsel is sometimes seen as the art paradigm of decision making because of its emphasis on realizing the authentic vision of the artist rather than the satisficing of diverse visions.

Counsel should not be discounted as a genuine and effective form of collective decision making. The King is only as wise as his counsel, but whereas both Majority and Consensus risk producing compromise decisions which are some kind of arithmetic mean of divers points of view, a decision by Counsel is the considered, undiluted and informed decision of one well-advised person.

According to those who have documented this paradigm, although there *are* procedural requirements to consult everyone implicated in the decision, the ethic of Counsel is primarily an ethic of *virtue*. The evidence called upon in decision making is generally precedent and traditional narrative. Many books have been written on the topic of the virtues of leadership; the attributes of the good leader are many, but include wisdom, charisma and the ability to listen, etc., etc., and the project led by such a leader will manifest these virtues in like measure. Once the Chief has made a decision, there is no dissent, so an outsider can easily mistake Counsel for Consensus.

Instances where a person is vested with authority in the field of action, I count as truncated or degenerate forms of Counsel; likewise tradespeople overseeing apprentices, parent raising children. Nevertheless, some features of Counsel will be manifested in these instances.

Majority

Although voting is known to have been used in antiquity, it was not transmitted to the societies which rose out of the ruins of the Roman Empire. Majority decision making, as we have come to know it, dates from the break-up of the early medieval period with the emergence of a merchant class and independent artisans based in the towns who had no rights in a feudal system organized by land ownership, tenancy and kinship. In order to look after their own welfare in the absence of protection in feudal society, they

formed guilds and corporations based on voluntary association and mutual aid. Modern parliaments, companies and trade unions all originate from these medieval guilds and by and large inherit from them the same procedures for collective decision making and the same ethical principles. Majority was adopted as the decision making principle of the labor movement from its beginnings in the early 19th century.

Majority is distinguished from Counsel and the norms of feudal society in general by its *egalitarianism* which is reflected in the capacity of each member of the collective to cast one vote *equal in value* to the vote of every other member. Such a procedure was simply unthinkable in feudal times though it did exist in truncated form within the Church and in Church elections. Although Majority may have originated as a pragmatic measure to allow decision making under conditions of equality, solidarity and tolerance, over the centuries it became hardened into a powerful ethical principle in its own right. Ordinary people experienced and practiced voting for centuries before universal suffrage was achieved. During the nineteenth century and during later struggles for universal suffrage Majority became arguably the most powerful and significant principle of political ethics, acting as a proxy for the notion of universal equality.

Under conditions where there is just one question to be decided and there is no dissent on the question to be posed, Majority is capable of producing a valid decision subject to provisos such as those outlined by Habermas (1984; 1987) in his Communicative Ethics. However, as Marquis de Condorcet showed 230 years ago and Amartya Sen (2002) has demonstrated quite exhaustively, majority voting is unable to consistently and reliably decide on realistic multi-dimensional and multivalent differences between members of a collective. However, over the centuries, elaborate procedures have been developed on the basis of the principle of Majority to facilitate relatively satisfactory decisions under a wide variety of conditions. Majority decisions carry great moral weight, foster creative deliberation, rational and reasonable dialogue and are invariably accepted by participants and concerned non-participants as ethically valid, provided they are arrived at in accordance with *agreed traditional procedures*, such as those documented in *Robert's Rules of Order* or Walter Citrine's *ABC of Chairmanship*.

The ethical status of Majority is an *established moral fact* of modernity, even though it cannot reliably and consistently function as a proxy for the moral equality of all persons. But it is the product of a tradition which is more than any other responsible for the very existence of modernity and the idea of equality of all human beings. Its ultimate justification is that tradition.

Majority decision making expresses, in addition to the principle of majority, three other ethical principles which are part of the same tradition and are built into the procedures for Majority decision making: *equality*, *tolerance* and *solidarity*.

As remarked above, it was the principle of *equality* which made possible and gave rise to Majority and is expressed in the equal value of each vote. The principle of equality means the equality of all members of the collective as autonomous agents having a stake in the decision.

The impulse which gave rise to Majority was not equality itself but the principle of *solidarity*, the same principle as referred to above in connection with relations between projects. Members extend mutual aid and maintain the collective irrespective of whether they are in agreement with the decision(s) – the minority works under the decision of the majority. This principle probably arose from pragmatic grounds inasmuch as a voluntary association can only survive by the fact that all contribute equally irrespective

of whether they agree with the conduct of the collective. Over the centuries the pragmatic acceptance of this principle became a matter of deeply held moral conviction, as is manifested in the opprobrium attached to words like traitor, scab, turncoat, etc.

Tolerance is the principle that complements and sustains the principle of solidarity – the majority sustains the loyalty of the minority and secures its continued participation, including its dissenting voice in decision making. Tolerance differs from laissez faire because the dissident is still required to maintain their contribution to the collective. And nor does it imply mutual respect, because even while the dissident is recognized as an independent moral agent with an equal stake in the decision and procedures will ensure that their voice is heard, if a view is in a minority no compromise is required out of respect to the minority view. Respect would entail that a minority view is not only listened to but respected in action.

These three ethical principles – equality, solidarity and tolerance – have been nurtured under the principle of Majority in the formation of the modern world.

Majority became fixed as an ethical principle in opposition to the rule of a wealthy and/or privileged nobility. However, in capitalist societies, it is restricted to a judiciously defined public sphere while the real decisions are made in a so-called private domain. As a consequence, Majority has proved to be an effective tool for the rule of a wealthy or privileged minority. This conundrum arises from the defects of Majority mentioned above. Voting is an abstract procedure *by itself* incapable of consistently and reliably guaranteeing rational and fair decisions on concrete questions.

With the professionalization of the unions and the decline in union participation, fewer and fewer ordinary people have the opportunity to participate in these "schools of communism" as Lenin (1920) called the trade unions; consequently, for many people voting connotes nothing but careerism and parliamentary duplicity, and there is an urgent need to generate forums for the practice of workers' democracy.

Consensus

Although Consensus decision making had been practiced among the Quakers since 1662, effectively Consensus was introduced by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and Women Strike for Peace in the USA in 1960/61. The social strata which were mobilized by these organizations were young Blacks in the South (and the students who supported them) and middle-class housewives respectively. These were two groups who had been excluded by the post-World War Two settlement and were inspired by the national liberation movements' on-going success in bringing an end to colonialism. Consensus spread from the SNCC and WSP to the Peace, Women's Liberation and Environmental Movements. As the profile of the labor movement in the social justice movements outside the workplaces declined from the late 1990s, Consensus became the preferred method of decision making among a larger and larger section of voluntary associations of all kinds.

The rationale for the use of Consensus in SNCC was that no-one could be forced to put their life on the line while confronting racism with nonviolent resistance. Only if a person had *positively consented* in formulating and deciding on an action could they be expected to endure its consequences. For WSP, Consensus was connected to their desire to remain firmly within the ideas and forms of action which were *uncontroversial within their own social base* and to avoid the construction of the apparatus of a voluntary organization. As things developed, we can see that the essential basis for Consensus is

that the only resource people have is each other (lacking property assets and full-time staff), and the collective has neither the desire nor the capacity to force individuals to comply with a collective decision. The impression is one of unity, but the essential counterpoise to unity is *laissez faire*. The actual process of discussion which generates the collective decision is not essentially different in Consensus and Majority; both aim for unanimity. “We decide what we do” is the maxim for both. The difference manifests itself when disagreement is persistent. In the case of Majority, there is solidarity and unity in action; in the case of Consensus, it is laissez faire.

Consensus fosters certain duties and virtues which are not fostered by Majority. The ethic of Consensus is above all *inclusion*. Discussion will continue until every point of view has not just been heard, but taken account of in the proposal. Even the ethic of laissez faire supports inclusion in that multiple actions are an alternative to pressing on for actual unity. Consensus does not foster solidarity however, because the dissident minority is free to go their own way and is under no obligation to support the majority in their decision.

Consensus also fosters *respect* for others, for difference. Whereas in Majority, the dissident is tolerated, in Consensus, the collective must continue discussing until the dissidents’ point of view has been incorporated. This can lead to intolerance for persistent nonconformity, but at the same time it denotes respect for those with a different opinion.

I don’t believe that equality is an ethical principle which is relevant to Consensus; persons are respected as *incommensurable* rather than equal, reflected in the respect for difference.

There is a serious problem with Consensus however, which has ethical implications; this is the *paradox of the status quo*: if there is no consensus, then the status quo ante is the default decision. Let us suppose that all the employees in a privately owned firm meet with the owner with a view to transforming the firm into a cooperative; everyone agrees except the owner; so, under the paradigm of Consensus, the firm remains in private hands. Consensus is implicitly *liberal*; social transformation cannot be achieved by Consensus, because participation in a social order is compulsory, and there is no possibility of opting out. Consensus if founded on the right to opt out.

Further, the absence of solidarity in the ethics of Consensus means that it is impossible to accumulate or look after assets. If you want a leaflet printed or premises for the night, find a trade union or socialist group to help you out.

Rawls and all the discourse ethicists *presume* that when ethical principles are derived by dialogue between participants *Consensus* is used. I believe that this is the reason that discourse ethics invariably arrives at liberal conclusions and is incapable of supporting radical social change. But Majority is also flawed because of its reliance on the question being asked. By far the most serious barrier to Socialism is, however, the simple fact that most of social life is not subject to either Consensus or Majority decision making, but, on the contrary, is deemed to lie within the private domain and is decided by Counsel.

Summary

Ethical communities are not constructed by moral philosophers or even by revolutionary leaders, police and judges. Ethical communities are constructed by collaborative projects of various kinds, essentially by forms of collective decision making and action.

The virtues which are manifested in social life have their basis in the demands of specific modes of collaboration, both forms of collaboration between distinct projects – mutuality, solidarity, philanthropy and collaboration as such, and forms of decision making within collectives of individuals – Counsel, Majority and Consensus. The virtues we have mentioned above – good faith, care, solidarity, trust, wisdom, attention, equality, tolerance, inclusion and respect and more – all originate in specific forms of collaborative project.

The Question of Delegation and Hierarchy

Two problems have plagued social change activism over the past millennium: delegation and hierarchy, with the incipient transformation of delegates into officers.

The tendency of a delegate structure to solidify into a hierarchy does not issue from egotism on the part of delegates, but on the contrary, more often because of the unwillingness or incapacity of other members of a collective to do the work required of a delegate (an incapacity which may be itself a product of the structure of delegation). Even in organizations where representation and delegation are absent, there is an incipient tendency for informal roles to fossilize into offices, and representatives to be transformed into managers. Voluntary associations have been aware of this tendency and have struggled to overcome it for at least 500 years. But without the use of delegation it is impossible to organize on a scale larger than the number of people who can meet in one room together. Over the centuries organizations have used various measures, such as limited terms of office, mandation of delegates, rotation of positions, etc., to manage this situation. There is however no substitute for the fostering of virtues among all the participants. The internet certainly moderates these pressures but I don't believe it essentially changes the situation.

MacIntyre's advice quoted above is relevant here: "without the virtues … practices could not resist the corrupting power of institutions." The fossilization of delegate structures into hierarchies is *a symptom not a cause* of the loss of the practical virtues and the degeneration of workers' democracy.

Conclusion

The two principal components of Franks' proposal – virtue ethics and prefiguration – are supported in the above reflections. However, Franks has framed prefiguration not as the practice of virtues, but as a social theory according to which prefiguration is a means to end, which is in turn conceived of in utopian terms.

The utopian conception of 'socialist society' is a projection onto a future society of socialist ethics. The practice of socialist ethics is not 'in miniature' but a fully concrete practice here and now.

Practices and their various projects and campaigns are not aimless, but *always* directed at their consequences. But *which* consequences are aimed at is always a matter of social theory and inevitably subject to on-going argument and reflection.

To answer "why did the chicken cross the road?" by "To get to the other side," is absurd. Even animals do things for a motive which is not the same as the immediate goal of the action. Our immediate goals are intelligible in terms of our social theory and our motivation. Our motivation will be consistent with our conception of the good, reflected in our socialist ethics.

Socialists do not need to be lectured on the evil of means-justifies-the-end thinking. Our socialist ethics are developed through decades of workers' struggles and they are in accord with the imperative of self-emancipation of the working class through the practice of solidarity. The virtue ethics which socialists embrace does not mandate this or that method of decision making, delegation, representation or structure. Invariably many imperatives come to bear in deciding on these matters and practical wisdom is always required to work out the best thing to do in each circumstance.

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