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───── **CONTENT**

The Unity of the Human Soul: A Dimensional Reading of *DA* II.3

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ABSTRACT*

This paper offers a new interpretation of the unity of the human soul's parts in *De Anima* II.3, drawing on the mathematical notion of dimension. Dimensionality, understood as an intrinsic property that parameterises a system's complexity by the number of its independent yet ordered parameters, provides a suitable framework for explaining the unity of the tripartite human soul. The nutritive, the perceptual, and the intellectual parts emerge as three definitionally distinct yet operationally ordered dimensions of a human being. Though anachronistic, this dimensional account is philosophically fruitful: it effectively unifies three structural features of the soul's parts – serial order, potential containment, and teleological subordination – identified in recent scholarship (Johansen 2012, 2014; Corcilius 2015, 2023, 2025).

For us humans, the process of understanding naturally involves dimensional reduction. An essential hallmark of any good model is the compression of reality to its more "relevant" aspects.

Jean-Pierre Eckmann & Tsvi Tlusty (2021, 1)

Yet every reduction of dimensionality cuts something out. A statue of an elephant may be unmistakably recognizable, but it does not move. A two-dimensional projection still retains features that distinguish it from a comparable projection of a tiger or a woodshed, but it must not be viewed from too flat an angle. And in one-dimensional projection all distinctive features are lost: nothing remains but abutting line segments.

C. F. Hockett (1987, 10)

——— INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is not to offer a detailed commentary on Aristotle's *DA* II.3, but rather to propose and justify a new interpretative framework for approaching the very problem of the unity of the parts – the faculties – of the human soul. I call this approach a dimensional reading. It is rooted in the modern mathematical notion of dimension – a broader and more flexible notion than that presupposed by classical geometry or mechanics – and I believe it provides a fruitful explanatory model for complex dynamic systems such as living species. My suggestion is that interpreting the unity of the parts of the human soul through this modern notion better fits Aristotle's project of a science of living perishable things[1] – in

particular, its hylomorphic and dispositional commitments.[1]

The problem of the unity of the parts of the human soul is commonly expressed by the following question: How do the different parts – the various psychic faculties – constitute a single, unified soul? Yet even a minimal familiarity with Aristotle's philosophy – above all with his hylomorphism – reveals that what appears to be a single question is in fact interwoven with two other questions, without which it cannot be answered. To ask how the parts of the soul form a unity is, first, to ask how those parts are related to one another. But to ask how the parts of the human soul – which is itself an inseparable part of the living human organism – form a

unity is, at the same time, to ask how the parts of the soul relate to the body and to the environment: how they are situated within it and how they interact with it. Thus, although these three questions[2] can be formulated independently, Aristotle's conception of the soul makes it impossible to tackle any one of them without at the same time taking the others into account.[3] With this in mind I propose a dimensional reading in order to situate the unity problem within the very conceptual framework from which it arises, and to offer a way of integrating the three structural features of the soul's parts identified in recent scholarship: serial order, potential containment, and teleological subordination/nesting.[4] I

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1   In Aristotle's *corpus* we can distinguish three different forms of life: (a) the life of the Prime Mover, whose life is pure activity of thinking; (b) the life of the celestial bodies, whose life consists of perfect – i.e. eternal – circular motion of bodies composed of imperishable matter; and finally (c) the life of perishable living things in the sublunary realm – that is, the life of organisms. Therefore, from now on, wherever Aristotle speaks of living perishable things, I will use the term "organisms".
For further discussion of forms of life that fall short of being ensouled, see, for example, Cohoe (2020). He rightly claims that the *DA* "does not, in fact, discuss all the beings that Aristotle takes to be living (ζωή), omitting the heavenly bodies, which Aristotle insists are alive, and the unmoved movers of *Meta. Λ*" (p. 284). Cohoe further clarifies: "Aristotle does think that ζωή, living, applies to the god and the heavenly bodies, but this term is not predicated univocally of the various living things and ζωή does not form an ordered series with a first member in the way that ψυχή does. Since ζωή is said primarily of the god, it is appropriate for Aristotle to leave inquiry into ζωή as a task for first philosophy. The science of the soul only covers sublunary living things" (p. 286).

2   Considering the hylomorphic framework of Aristotle's thinking, we may discern that these three – the unity, interaction, and en-activity questions – constitute a single rope, as it were, spun from three distinct yet inseparable spindles.

3   Concerning the very possibility of addressing these questions in Aristotle's philosophy individually, see e.g. Corcilius (2015). He distinguishes five different questions but responds to them in an interconnected manner. "How do the different faculties of the soul relate to each other? Aristotle raises this question himself. His answer, though far from satisfactory, is very interesting. It also provides a first approach towards answering the third question regarding the unity of the soul." (2015, 41–49). For the modern debate about the possibility of keeping the problems of unity and interaction separate, see e.g. Boyle (2016, 550).

4   See Johansen (2012, 67–72, 278–283) and Corcilius (2015, 42–45; 2023, 119–136; 2025, 43). Both authors identify all three relations among the parts of the soul, even though they employ slightly different labels. Moreover, the very choice of labels already discloses the interconnectedness of these three relations. Thus, for instance, teleological *subordination* is grounded in the notion of a serial *order*, while *containment* points not only to

present this proposal in the conviction that, once understood in this way, the unity problem may be unravelled.

The structure of the paper reflects this aim. The first section outlines Aristotle's hylomorphism, dispositionalism, and explanatory strategies within his science of organisms, and explains why the human soul appears there as an internally structured explanans. The second section presents Aristotle's account of the three parts of the human soul and examines a geometrical analogy he employs to elucidate their unity. The third section highlights the limitations of an overly geometrical interpretation, which risks obscuring the hylomorphic, dispositional, and explanatory character of the soul, and prepares the ground for the dimensional reading of the unity problem. The fourth and final section considers the potential advantages of my proposal.[5]

one part's including another but also to the way in which the activation of a higher, later-developing part delimits the exercise of the capacities belonging to the lower part.

5   I am fully aware that my proposal rests on several presuppositions whose acceptance is anything but self-evident, and which cannot be justified in detail here. Yet should the reader be willing to concede them, she will find in return a useful tool by means of which the tightly interwoven triad of questions may be disentangled. It might also seem that the paper's architecture ought to be different: one should first offer a universal (and as neutral as possible) description of Aristotle's position, then provide a critical assessment of the main modern interpretations that continue to shape the debate, and only at the end advance one's own reading, together with an account of its advantages. This procedure, however, is not available here, for, as I have stressed, my proposal of a dimensional reading does not aspire to constitute a full-scale interpretation of the problem and therefore cannot function as an alternative

1. ARISTOTLE'S SCIENCE OF ORGANISMS AND ITS HYLOMORPHIC AND DISPOSITIONAL FRAMEWORK

One of Aristotle's major methodological innovations – in contrast to both Plato and the Hippocratic writers – was to extend dispositional analysis (that is, the analysis of processes in terms of *dunamis* and *energeia*) from the change of some X into Y also to the coming-to-be of X at all – that is, to the gradual temporal realisation of a species-form.[6] This innovation concerns natural bodies first and foremost. It is also bound to the thesis that every natural body has an ontological structure composed of matter and form. Later called hylomorphism, this view holds that matter and form are two aspects of a single unified natural body. Crucially, in real living bodies, matter and form are inseparable. They can be separated only by means of hylomorphic analysis – an abstraction we perform in thought. Aristotle emphatically rejects the independent subsistence of forms outside matter in the sublunary realm.

When Aristotle considers the essential forms of particular species of organisms in abstraction, they express what the natural bodies of that species are able to do and to undergo. This is precisely why Aristotle defines the soul as the first actuality of a natural body which has life

to the detailed and textually rich accounts offered by Johansen and Corcilius. Rather, it provides a framing approach intended to highlight that in engaging with these – and, indeed, with any – interpretations, we must keep in view the hylomorphic and dispositional background of Aristotle's philosophy. Moreover, to pursue that line would take us beyond the scope of the present paper.

6   See Corcilius (2015, 33–38).

in potentiality.[7] Hence, the fundamental capacities of a species – nutrition, perception, thinking – express what its members are capable of. They name the possibilities of its species-specific development – not mere logical possibilities, but real, guaranteed dispositions that become actual over time. We find the explicit application of hylomorphism to the science of organisms in *DA* II.1: *hylē* is the natural organic body potentially alive, and *morphē* is the soul as its first actuality.[8] A soul is always and necessarily embodied; a living body is always and necessarily ensouled. To think of a soul or body separately from the living substance is therefore to consider them as products of analysis – and to speak of them only in a derivative sense.[9]

I take Aristotle's *De anima* to be best understood as a prolegomenon to any future science of organisms – a theoretical groundwork for the systematic study of living perishable beings. In this science, it is the soul itself that functions as the primary explanatory principle. What, then, is explained by the soul? In general, the soul explains the manifestations of organisms, namely: (a) the functional organisation of their bodies (*PA* I.1); (b) their inclinations and patterns of behaviour (*DA* I.5), and (c) those activities that belong jointly to the soul and body (*Sens* 1). This general account is further specified for the subset of animals in *Historia animalium* I.1, 488a7–19: "there are four groups of traits that animals possess *qua* animals: their functional body-parts (*merē*), their actions (*praxeis*), their ways of life (*bioi*), and their character traits (*ēthē*)." Although enumerated, these four domains are causally interconnected, forming a unified explanatory field.

Taken together, in Aristotle's science of organisms, the essential forms of particular species articulate what the natural bodies belonging to those species are capable of doing and undergoing. The fundamental capacities of living beings – nutrition, perception, and thought – are thus species-specific dispositions of the hylomorphic whole, the ensouled body, whose actualisation unfolds over time. Consequently, the soul is an explanans, and it is identical with its explanatorily relevant capacities – its faculties – even though the subject that bears and exercises these faculties is always the individual organism of the species. But it is crucial to clarify what it means to say that the soul itself is an explanans or an explanatory posit within the science of organisms.[10] This does not deny the

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7 See *DA* II.1, 412a27–28: "διὸ ψυχή ἐστιν ἐντελέχεια ἡ πρώτη σώματος φυσικοῦ δυνάμει ζωὴν ἔχοντος".

8 A central feature of Aristotle's hylomorphism is developed in *DA* II.1 and II.2. But the basic idea that a certain kind of soul is the form of a certain kind of body is already stated in *DA* 407b23–26.

9 Corcilius (2015, 35) writes: "The only difference between general hylomorphism and its psychological application is that the essential form of living bodies is called soul, and the correlated matter is called living body (*DA* II 1, 412a11). This last point, that it is not the dead but the living body that is the matter of the soul, reminds us of the fact that the form/matter distinction is not a distinction between two physically distinct components of natural bodies, but between two ontological aspects of one and the same natural body."

10 Corcilius (2025, 23) claims that the soul itself "is a scientific postulate, an artefact at the highest level of biological abstraction, more

existence of the soul; rather, it means that in this scientific project we abstract the soul from the manifestations of organisms and encapsulate it as that which functions as the formal, efficient, and final cause – that is, the explanatory principle – of their life activities.

In *PA* I.1, 639a15–22 Aristotle poses a methodological question crucial for the science of organisms. Should the scientist seek the explanatory essence for each species individually, or should he begin from what is common to several species – formulating concepts that are broader and explain more? Aristotle's answer is clear. One should begin from a commensurately universal level – as general as possible and only as specific as necessary – so as to explain the common phenomena found across a maximally wide range of actually existing species.[11] The reasons are economical. Such a procedure prevents unnecessary repetition, minimises explanatory labour, maintains systematic order, and yields a hierarchical science. We begin from what is most general and proceed to what is more particular. Each explanandum thus receives its explanans in the proper place. To know something scientifically is to give a cause of it that is neither too general nor too specific.[12]

Two important consequences follow. (1) This method generates concepts – scientific posits – that easily tempt us to look for their supposed ontological correlates (for example, "the animal as such"). But in the real world there is room only for the souls of particular species as instantiated in individual organisms, not for general explanatory constructs mistakenly treated as existing entities. What exists is a range of concrete species (bees, horses, human beings), not a generic animal; and likewise, there are only species-specific actualisations of psychic faculties, not a generic faculty of perception. (2) Two different sets of species therefore emerge: those whose highest and final dispositional capacity is, for example, perception, and those that possess this same capacity together with an additional one – for instance rationality – to which the former is subordinated. In more complex species, an internal structure of the soul thus arises: an ordered series of explanatory faculties such that each later faculty presupposes its predecessor and, when followed by another, serves that successor.

2. THE PARTS OF THE SOUL, THE UNITY PROBLEM, AND ARISTOTLE'S GEOMETRICAL ANALOGY

Aristotle opens *DA* II.2 by identifying the soul as the explanatory principle of the science of all organisms (413a20–23). His first step is descriptive. Beginning from what organisms in fact do and undergo, he identifies four broad kinds of life activity through which the presence of the soul is manifested: nutrition (*kinesis kata*

abstract than other and more familiar scientific abstractions of such a kind, as e.g. blooded or locomotive animals. However, in spite of being, from an ontological perspective, posterior to actually existing kinds of living things, it is definitionally and explanatorily prior to them."

11   See also *APo* I.4, 73b25–74a3; I.5, 74a32–b3.

12   For a more detailed account of the nature of the scientific procedure, see Corcilius (2025, 32, n. 14).

trophēn kai phthisis te kai auxēsis), perception (*aisthēsis*), locomotion-and-rest (*kinesis kai stasis kata topon*), and thinking (*nous*).[13] These are not yet parts or faculties of the soul, but observable activities of organisms, and Aristotle treats them as the explananda. Since the soul is posited as the principle responsible for these activities (413b11–13), he then argues that it must possess distinct faculties (*dynameis*) corresponding to the kinds of activity it explains.

However, the mapping between activities and faculties is not one-to-one. Although there are four observable activities, there are only three principles – active powers – that account for them: the nutritive faculty (*to threptikon*), the perceptual faculty (*to aisthētikon*), and the faculty for thinking (*to dianoētikon*). As the Greek terminology already suggests – note the absence of the suffix *-ikos* in the case of *kinesis* – locomotion does not correspond to a basic faculty. It is not grounded in a distinct psychic principle but is produced and/or coordinated chiefly by the operation of the perceptual and the thinking faculties.[14] Hence Aristotle aims to identify the minimal set of explanatory principles sufficient to

account for the characteristic activities manifested across the full range of species. The distinction between capacities and faculties is essential here: capacities are the wide array of life activities observed across organisms; faculties are the minimal explanatory structures without which those capacities could not be scientifically understood.[15]

This yields an important methodological consequence. The three faculties identified by Aristotle – the nutritive, the perceptual, and the intellectual – constitute a general explanatory model, not three separate entities. Although they are defined separately, from a hylomorphic and dispositional perspective they constitute a hierarchically ordered sequence of active powers.[16] The model is thus unified and hierarchically ordered: later faculties presuppose the earlier ones in the order of explanation. This hierarchical structure makes it possible to explain the life activities of organisms of various degrees of complexity by means

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13   See *DA* II.2, 413a23–25.

14   According to Aristotle (especially *DA* III.10, 433a23–26; 433b5-9, but also *MA* 6–7, 699b34–701a6), desire (*orexis*) is the final cause of locomotion and of the life activity of all kinds of animals. In some species, desire is the expression of their immediate or experience-based appetitiveness (*epithumia*) and is to be explained with reference to the faculty of perception; in others, it is the expression of a rational wish (*boulēsis*) and is to be explained with reference to the faculty of thinking. For a more detailed account see Pearson (2012).

15   Corcilius & Gregoric (2010) justify this interpretation and show that the narrative taking "parts of the soul" as a mere mode of parlance equivalent to speaking of "capacities" of the soul misses a basic structuring distinction in Aristotle's thinking about the soul.

16   See also Corcilius (2023, 111–115). He writes: "In his *De anima*, Aristotle is committed to both of the following claims: (i) each of the parts of the soul can be defined separately from the other parts, and (ii) the parts jointly constitute the explanatory essence of living things. Thus, some sort of talk of addition of parts does apply to Aristotle's conception of parts of the soul. This is why *De anima* II 3 explicitly recommends defining the soul as the explanatory principle of the science of living things by going through the series of the definitions of the parts in turn, i.e. by defining each part separately." (p. 111)

of a minimal sequence[17] of faculties. A species whose activities consist only of nutrition, growth, decay, and reproduction can be fully explained through the nutritive faculty alone. A species that is also capable of perception requires both the nutritive and the perceptual faculties. And a human being – whose characteristic activities include intellectual operations such as calculation, reasoning, and deliberation – requires all three faculties in order to be fully described and explained.

Aristotle defines all three faculties explicitly. The nutritive faculty is the capacity that preserves the thing which possesses it (416b17–20).[18] In nourishment, there is an uptake of the matter-of-environment into the matter-of-organism; for example, we take in nutrients from food, and this keeps our bodies alive. The perceptual faculty is defined as the capacity to receive perceptible forms without their matter (424a17–24).[19] This faculty accounts for the transmission of forms from the environment to the organism without matter, and it enables certain species to navigate through their surroundings, thereby allowing them to move from place to place.[20] Finally,

the intellectual faculty is the capacity to receive intelligible forms – essences – and to operate upon them in inference (429a10).[21] But how do these different parts – these distinct faculties – constitute a single soul? Even before providing the above-mentioned definitions of these parts, Aristotle formulates the question of their unity and addresses it by means of a famous geometrical analogy.

It is clear, then, that in the same way there could be one account for both soul and figure. For in the one case a figure is nothing beyond a triangle and the others following in a series, and in the other a soul is nothing beyond the things mentioned. There could, however, in the case of figures be a common account which fits them

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17   I intentionally avoid the term *set*, because – unlike a serial order – it does not, by definition, require a fixed ordering of its elements.

18   *DA* II.4, 416b17–20: ὥσθ᾽ ἡ μὲν τοιαύτη τῆς ψυχῆς ἀρχὴ δύναμίς ἐστι ola σῴζειν τὸ ἔχον αὐτὴν ᾗ τοιοῦτον, ἡ δὲ τροφὴ παρασκευάζει ἐνεργεῖν. διὸ στερηθὲν τροφῆς ον δύναται εἶναι.

19   *DA* II.12, 424a18–19: ἡ αἴσθησίς ἐστι τὸ δεκτικὸν τῶν αἰσθητῶν εἰδῶν ἄνευ τῆς ὕλης

20   One of the most recent and most comprehensive accounts of perception can be found in Caston (2020). Drawing on the notions of transduction and ratios, Caston offers an exceptionally compelling account of how forms are transmitted in the process of perception. He writes that our senses "receive the form in question by embodying and replicating certain features that are essential to the active quality, specifically the ratios Aristotle thinks define perceptible qualities, and thereby receive information about the perceptible object" (p. 15; see also pp. 28–37).

21   Thinking is the activity of grasping or processing intelligible forms. But, for reason to take any form, it must not itself be of any form. This is why Aristotle thinks of reason as a pure capacity (*dunamis*) of receiving and combining any set of forms that are not intrinsically contradictory (*DA* 429a18–21). Therefore, Aristotle claims of reason that nothing is its nature except being potential (*hoti dunaton*) (*DA* 429a22–23). Unless reason thinks, it is nothing. When it thinks, it is what it thinks. It is in this spirit that Aristotle's statements about reason as potentiality (*dunamis*), as the locus of forms (*topon eidon*), and as that which become all (*panta ginesthai*) must be understood. Thus, the intellectual faculty not only has no bodily organ but is itself nothing but what it just performs.

all, though it will be peculiar to none; and the same holds in the case of the souls mentioned. For this reason, it is ludicrous to seek a common account in these cases, or in other cases, an account which is not peculiar to anything which exists, and which does not correspond to any proper and indivisible species, while neglecting what is of this sort. Consequently, one must ask individually what the soul of each is, for example, what the soul of a plant is, and what the soul of a man or a beast is. What holds in the case of the soul is very close to what holds concerning figures: for in the case of both figures and ensouled things, what is prior is always present potentially in what follows in a series – for example, the triangle in the square, and the nutritive faculty in the perceptual faculty. One must investigate the reason why they are thus in a series. For the perceptual faculty is not without the nutritive, though the nutritive faculty is separated from the perceptual in plants.

DA II.3, 414b20–415a3, tr. Shields (2016, 27–28)

Just as there is no geometrical object called simply "figure"[22] in existence apart from specific figures such as triangles, squares, or pentagons, so too there is no entity called "the soul itself" existing over and above the particular kinds of souls instantiated in individual species of organisms (*kath' hekaston*). The ontological point is thus clear. To be a form is to be a determinate form. In geometry, to be a closed plane figure is to be a figure of a specific kind – a triangle, a quadrilateral, a pentagon, and so on. And likewise in the science of organisms: to be a soul is to be the soul of a particular species.

Indeed, we can construct a general concept whose extension includes all closed plane figures – for example, a polygon. Such a concept is explanatorily useful; nevertheless, it is not a first-order geometrical object, but rather a product of abstraction and generalisation adopted for the sake of explanatory economy. In this respect, a polygon plays a role analogous to that of the soul itself in the science of organisms. The geometrical analogy thus clarifies the ontological dimension of the issue: there exist only individual instances of particular kinds of organisms (e.g. horses, humans), and the corresponding kinds of souls exist only as integral aspects of the living composites – separable in thought solely as the result of hylomorphic analysis.

Let us now turn to the way in which these three parts of the soul are related to one another and thereby form a unity. Interpreters working on the unity problem generally agree that three characteristics clarify how the three faculties of the human soul form a single, explanatorily ordered whole: serial order, potential containment or inclusion, and teleological subordination or nesting.[23]

Although not always explicitly highlighted, the serial order of the faculties

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22   It is meant to be a closed plane figure. See Polansky (2007, 194–195) or Shields (2016, 266).

23   See Johansen (2012, 67–72, 278–283) and Corcilius (2015, 42–45; 2023, 119–136; 2024, 43).

follows naturally from the explanatory logic of Aristotle's science of living beings. The explanatory sequence begins with the most fundamental part – the faculty responsible for the self-preservation of an organism. Additional faculties are introduced only when required to explain further life activities that cannot be accounted for by the lower faculty alone. The resulting sequence is therefore generated not arbitrarily but by explanatory necessity, and it yields a progressively layered structure reflecting the increasing complexity of the activities to be explained.

Something that is closely connected with this is the idea of potential containment. The lower and more basic faculties are present within the higher ones only potentially, not actually. This means that the activities of the lower faculties remain discernible within those of the higher solely as operative conditions, not as independently exercised powers. For a higher faculty to be actualised, the lower faculties must be concurrently active – either as ongoing processes or at least in the form of the outputs of those processes. Simply put, what does not live cannot perceive or move from place to place; and what neither perceives nor imagines cannot abstract or withdraw from its own representations. In this sense, each higher faculty contains the lower as a constitutive prerequisite, while nevertheless remaining functionally and explanatorily distinct from it.

Finally, the series exhibits teleological subordination. The lower faculties do not merely precede the higher in the order of explanation; they also exist for the sake of the higher. Their activities are organised towards ends that are completed and perfected by the higher faculties. Thus, the nutritive capacity sustains the perceptual life of animals, and the perceptual capacity provides the cognitive preconditions necessary for the actualisation of intellect in human beings. Teleological subordination therefore shows that the unity of the soul is not merely sequential or structural, but purposive as well: the activities of the lower powers contribute to, and are integrated within, the finality realised by the higher.

Taken together, these three characteristics – serial order, potential containment, and teleological subordination – offer a coherent account of how the three faculties jointly constitute a unified explanatory model of the human soul.

3. BEYOND THE GEOMETRICAL ANALOGY: TOWARDS A DIMENSIONAL READING

Even while acknowledging the genuine insights yielded by the geometrical analogy, I believe that if we do not allow ourselves to be overly constrained by it and instead turn to the modern notion of dimension, we gain a more appropriate instrument for articulating the unity and the relations among the parts of the soul – one capable of integrating the three characteristics just identified and of making explicit the dynamism and temporality inherent in Aristotle's hylomorphic and dispositional framework.

The geometrical analogy, after all, exhibits two significant limitations. First, it is *static.* It presents a sequence of timeless geometrical objects and

thus cannot capture the becoming of a determinate form – the ontogenetic, temporal, and causal realisation that is, for Aristotle, essential to the life of organisms. Second, it is *single-levelled*. It offers a flat series of shapes within a single plane, whereas Aristotle's explanatory hierarchy concerns different levels of being – plants, non-human animals, and human beings – and the explanation of each of these levels requires a distinct degree of complexity in the explanatory model, consisting of a different number of explanatory parameters. The analogy thus fails to show that what is at stake is not merely the accumulation of additional faculties but a transition to higher and categorically different levels of psychical organisation. Let me therefore turn to the modern notion of dimension.

Following Eckmann & Tlusty (2021, 1), we may understand dimension as "the number of independent parameters required to fully describe a system". Each dimension names a distinct mode of possible operation of a system. The more dimensions a system possesses, the greater its potential range of behaviour and the greater its complexity and non-linearity across time. Importantly, this modern notion is inherently dynamic. Living systems, unlike non-living ones, generate and (re)organise their dimensions over time through feedback. A living organism is thus a system that creates, maintains, and even transforms its own dimensionality.[24]

Concerning the relations among dimensions, the simplest way to understand the relation among dimensions is to imagine the gradual expansion of a space by a new direction, that is, "building dimensions upon one another". Each new dimension arises by *adding* one independent direction to the original dimension, and this new direction is independent in the sense that it cannot be expressed as a combination of the preceding dimensions. The relation among the dimensions of a single system is recursive. Each dimension is an "envelope" of a lower one. From the topological point of view, each lower dimension is a subspace of a higher dimension (embedding) and it can be said that each lower dimension is thus the shadow of the higher. For example, a line "fits" into a plane, a plane "fits" into space, etc. At the same time, it holds that each dimension contains all the preceding ones. Dimensions thus form a hierarchy: each higher dimension contains the lower only as special cases but has new relations that have no meaning in the lower dimensions. We can therefore conclude that the number

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24 For a systematic organisational account of living systems in terms of closure of constraints, formal causation and teleology – explicitly framed as biological autonomy – see

Moreno & Mossio (2015). They describe living organisms as organised systems which are able to self-maintain as integrated entities, to establish their own goals and norms, and to promote the conditions of their existence through their interactions with the environment. The topics covered in this book include organisation and biological emergence, organisms, agency, levels of autonomy, cognition, and a look at the historical dimension of autonomy. While the Aristotelian vocabulary may not be front-and-centre everywhere, the philosophical lineage is clearly present – it is part of the move to re-insert notions of organisation, function, purpose, and self-maintenance into biology, in contrast to purely mechanistic accounts.

of dimensions expresses the degree of freedom of movement, or rather the possibilities of realisation of a system.

I think it is already clear why I propose to use the modern concept of dimension in the interpretation of the problem of unity. If we apply it to Aristotle's account of the complexity of the human soul, we obtain the following picture. The three parts of the human soul – the nutritive, the perceptual, and the intellectual – form an ordered set of three definitionally separate yet operationally unidirectionally conditioned dimensions, that is, psychic faculties that fully account for the range of human psychophysical manifestations. In Aristotle's view the higher parts of the human soul, the perceptive and the intellectual, provide the possibility of a double liberation in relation to the nutritive part. In the first stage, man is in thrall to the necessity of natural life. He is dependent on the immediate environment and receives it by material exchange. In the second stage, by virtue of his perceptive faculty, he moves in search of what he needs. He is able to maintain representations of the goals of his natural development and preserve what Mother Nature (and/or his community) has designated as his own good. And in the third, rational stage, he moves away from the motivational-desiderative framework of the first two dimensions by being able to reflect on what he should be moving towards. Thus, he gains a distance from his animality by participating in the activity of thinking. Each dimension is an irreplaceable explanatory element of the overall explanatory model, which

serves to describe the diverse behavioural manifestations of a member of the human species. D1 describes the basic fact of life that occurs as a result of the material interaction of the organism with its environment. The operational autonomy of D1 is evidenced by the possibility of a vegetative state of man, and the operational autonomy of D2 and the operational additionality of D3 are in turn evidenced by the fact that an organism of the human species must first be informed, i.e. must perceptually grasp certain features of the environment in order to be able to additionally process them with reason.

I propose to understand the three faculties of the human soul as degrees of freedom that enable us to articulate fully the behavioural possibilities and characteristic modes of life of our species. The first is nutritive movement, understood as a form of liberation within the environment: growth and reproduction conceived as a kind of movement in place. The second is perception-based locomotion, understood as liberation from the immediacy of the environment: movement from place to place, fuelled by the pursuit of perceived and/or imagined goods and by the avoidance of perceived and/or imagined harmful things. And finally, the third is intellection, understood as liberation above both the environment and the sphere of subjective desires and representations: the activity of the intellect, the self-determining orientation towards objective goods.[25]

25　See also Corcilius (2023, 134–135): "Aristotle is no doubt firmly committed to the thesis that the perceptual and nutritive parts of

Hence, I propose to understand "dimensions" as parameters of a dynamic system. Dimensions help us to fully describe the human being in terms of its distinctive forms of motion – that is, forms of liberation: beginning with movement in place, proceeding to movement through space, and culminating in movement above the subjective sphere, oriented towards the realm of values such as truth, justice, and the common good.

4. THE EXPLANATORY YIELD OF A DIMENSIONAL READING

The questions concerning unity and the interrelations among the parts of the human soul are notoriously difficult. But if we acknowledge the dispositionalist framework of Aristotle's science of organisms – which conceives of the human being as an organism that, like any other specimen of a natural kind, gradually actualises its specific form – and if we pay attention to Aristotle's hylomorphic claim that the human soul is realised through the body, thereby conferring upon it its species-specific functional organisation, characteristic capacities, behavioural possibilities, and mode of life, then our chances of grasping the problem of the unity of the soul correctly increase significantly. To ask how the parts of the human soul constitute a unity is, in effect, to ask how the parts of a complex explanatory model – constructed to account for the manifold

the human soul are teleologically subordinated to the rational part. He says so many times. He is also committed to the thesis that from a normative perspective rational goals should be a *per* se cause of human action (as opposed to animal self-motion)."

capacities and manifestations distinctive of our species – can themselves form a unified whole. The straightforward answer is: by being parts of one and the same bearer.

Why, then, must this explanatory model be internally articulated, i.e. composed of three definitionally distinct and mutually irreducible, yet asymmetrically existentially dependent parameters? Because it must account adequately for the empirical regularities of the tensions within our life, tensions rooted in the fact that multiple, sometimes contrary, motivational powers operate within us. We are daily witnesses to psychophysical impulses (for example, sexual appetite or reflexive avoidance of what is painful or aversive) coming into conflict with what reason counsels – rational considerations that take into account future goods, the good of the whole, or justice, goods not confined to the agent's immediate subjective perspective. The phenomenon of asthenic akrasia is paradigmatic in this respect. And it is precisely for these explanatory purposes that Aristotle introduces an internally structured scheme consisting of three fundamental and mutually irreducible parts.

The problem of unity is thus inseparable from the problem of interaction. To inquire how the parts of the human soul interact is analogous to asking how the distinct dimensions of a given system relate to one another. They do so as a serially ordered sequence. As we have already noted, the dimensionality of a system is expressed by the number of independent yet hierarchically ordered parameters it comprises. Consequently,

the parts of the soul – and, by analogy, the dimensions of a dynamically developing entity – stand in relations that are (1) sequential, (2) such that the acts of the higher depend existentially on the acts of the lower, which are "absorbed" into the higher,[26] and (3) teleological, such that the lower are subordinated to the end actualised by the highest part or ultimate dimension. Crucially, however, the lower components retain the possibility of operating independently of the higher whenever the latter are, for whatever reason, not initiated or actualised.[27]

I am convinced that approaching the problem of unity through a dimensional reading (henceforth DR) offers several advantages, especially when compared with interpretations that rely on analogies between the parts of the soul and geometrical objects confined to a plane. The contemporary mathematical notion of dimension – conceiving of dimensionality as the number of degrees of freedom an entity possesses – is sufficiently broad to encompass not only timeless geometrical forms but also dynamically developing entities. This makes it particularly suitable for capturing the subject matter of Aristotle's science of living perishable things. Organisms are living bodies precisely because they contain within themselves the principle (*archē*) of motion and change.[28] Organisms unfold their development through the gradual actualisation of species-guaranteed capacities. Every (human) individual progressively actualises dispositions specific to the species, and this actualisation is not merely brought about by the passage of time but also presupposes an active stance that manifests on three distinct levels: by ingesting food; by pursuing what is pleasant and avoiding what is harmful, and finally, by undergoing upbringing and education.

Moreover, the contemporary mathematical concept of dimension has the significant advantage that – unlike the concept of "soul" – it is not burdened by two millennia of interpretations portraying the soul as the bearer or possessor of psychic faculties (the Platonising reading of Aristotle), as a subsistent entity (the Arab-Thomistic tradition), or as something akin to eternal geometrical objects. Employing the modern concept thus allows us to make clear both (a) that dimensions are always dimensions of something (the soul is always the soul of a determinate kind of organism), and (b) that the bearers of dimensions are

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26 Potentially contained within them, as *phantasia* is contained within *noēsis*, or matter within sensible form.

27 Such a condition may arise from insufficient nutrition, from excessively weak or excessively strong environmental stimuli, from a perverted upbringing, from a lack of self-discipline, or even only temporarily – for instance as a result of illness, intoxication, or countless other factors that may be either external or internal to the subject.

28 In contrast to the zero-dimensionality of non-living natural bodies and artefacts, this is the first dimension of organisms. Aristotle maintains that everything ensouled is capable of movement and is itself the source of both its motion and its rest. Plants, however, exhibit only one kind of movement – nutritive movement, the kind involved in growth and decline. Animals additionally possess the capacity for locomotion, and human beings can further direct both of these kinds of movement in accordance with the ends set by the motion of reason. See *DA* II.1, 412b15–18.

not abstract objects but dynamically developing entities that progressively actualise their species form.

This is precisely the point at which DR enjoys a major advantage over readings grounded in analogies with geometrical forms – readings in which the dynamism involved in the constructive unfolding of individual figures is obscured, as once a geometrical figure is opened up, it ceases to be what it was and becomes something different – a figure of a different kind. A further disadvantage of any purely "geometrical reading" is that a series of figures lying on the same plane (i.e. within two-dimensional space) hardly conveys the idea of the subject's liberation through the acquisition of an additional capacity. DR, by contrast, allows us to demonstrate elegantly that adding a new parameter to a subject that has already actualised some of its dispositions radically expands the range of possible actualisations, even as it simultaneously increases the potential for internal tensions or conflicts.

Additionally, DR smoothly integrates all three of the currently proposed systematic accounts of the relations among the soul's parts that secure their unity, while also offering further advantages in comparison with established interpretations.[29]

In comparison with Christopher Shields, who speaks in terms of the removal of the higher dimensions,[30] the DR proposal does not treat the absence of higher dimensions as a removal, but rather as the non-actualisation of a higher dimension or dispositional property that is nevertheless species-guaranteed within Aristotle's framework. As in the case of geometrical objects, a dimension is fixed by the conditions of construction. A dimension or disposition cannot simply be removed without thereby destroying the very subject to which it belongs. It may, however, remain unused or unexercised. We cannot remove a dimension from a cube without ceasing to have a cube. Analogously, we cannot remove the disposition for thinking from a human being without ceasing to speak of a human being. We can, however, readily note that a three-dimensional system need not exercise a given degree of freedom – i.e. it need not actualise or manifest it.

Compared with Johansen's proposal, which models the potential containment of the lower parts by the higher on the analogy of letters embedded in more complex words,[31] DR avoids the difficulties inherent in the very medium of writing. Johansen's analogy misses the mark because written letters persist as actually present constituents of the word; on this model, the soul's parts would remain actually present and overtly traceable

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29   It remains true, as footnotes 4 and 23 have already indicated, that the three interpretations discussed below – those of Shields, Johansen, and Corcilius – offer detailed and comprehensive treatments of the unity problem and converge on the same three relational parameters: serial order, potential containment, and teleological subordination.

30   And, thereby, in my view, losing sight of their necessary, species-guaranteed presence. See Shields (2016, 197).

31   See Johansen (2012, 49–50).

as internal, unchanged constituents of the unified whole.[32] DR improves upon Johansen's word-letter analogy by showing that the higher dimension – a higher degree of freedom – simply would not exist without the lower, and yet the presence of the lower is no longer straightforwardly visible. For instance, thinking no longer displays the experiential richness and subjectivity of the images from which we abstract the fundamental constituents of thought.

As for Corcilius's interpretation (2015, 2023, 2025), the initial version of DR that I propose does not match the subtlety or systematic breadth of his analysis. Nonetheless, I hope it helps bring out the correctness and accuracy of his interpretation by making clearly intelligible the crucial distinction between what he calls natural and non-natural teleology and the teleological subordination of the lower parts of the soul to the higher in these two distinct frameworks.[33] DR entails that the third dimension of the human organism makes possible a radical emancipation from the "programme" of its nature.[34] Our third dimension allows us to step back both from the aim of self-preservation and from subjective natural teleology (which, according to Corcilius, is embedded within objective natural teleology) that consists of actively pursuing and satisfying species-given goods as affectively represented. This emancipation is made possible by something that only the third dimension can both formulate and form: the capacity for normative thinking. Through normativity – especially as manifested in linguistic practice – we can step back from our nature and desires towards what is objectively and truly good.[35]

Finally, by preserving both the idea of capacities added in a serial order and the idea of transformation, DR contains the potential for a certain reconciliation in the debate between additivists and transformativists.[36]

▬▬ CONCLUSION

Aristotle's dispositionalism holds that belonging to a species – for example, the human species – consists of possessing species-specific capacities that are ordered towards their appropriate actualisations. Species membership entails a developmental programme that unfolds over time and requires the active participation of the subject, the bearer of the soul. To belong to a species is therefore to possess the potential to actualise, in due course, the full range of its characteristic dispositions. Even when the

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32   This problem could be mitigated by shifting the analogy to spoken language, where letters do not endure – yet even then, additional disadvantages would arise that I cannot discuss here.

33   See Corcilius (2023, 121–136).

34   In Corcilius's terms – from objective natural teleology.

35   In Corcilius's terms, the level of non-natural teleology liberates us from our nature and desires in favour of rational grounds.

36   However, DR does so without treating the process of transformation as necessary. For discussion of whether the relation between the perceptual and rational parts of the soul in Aristotle should be understood in an additive or a transformative way, see e.g. Glock (2019); Christofidou (2021); Corcilius (2023).

higher capacities are not fully actualised,[37] the lower ones remain operative.[38]

To have a human soul thus means not only to live in a place, nor merely being informed about features of one's environment and navigating it through perception and desire, it also means possessing the capacity for thought: the ability to reflect upon, determine, strategically plan, and realise one's ends, thereby becoming the architect of one's own life. The three parts of the human soul are therefore three irreducible and mutually irreplaceable parameters of an explanatory model that accounts for the full range of behavioural possibilities and structural properties characteristic of our species.

Why, then, should we apply the seemingly anachronistic concept of dimensionality[39] rather than Aristotle's own static geometrical series to the question of unity? Simply because dimensionality captures more adequately the hylomorphic and dispositional logic that underlies Aristotle's science of living beings. A dimensional reading better fulfils Aristotle's explanatory aims. It preserves the hierarchy, dynamism, and temporality that the static geometrical model lacks. I do not claim that Aristotle anticipated the modern concept of dimensionality; I claim only that, had he possessed it, it would have served his philosophical purposes with remarkable precision.

37   Or, for some reason, cannot be actualised.

38   *Contra* strong transformativist accounts of the parts of the soul in Aristotle see e.g. Christofidou (2021, 217) and Corcilius (2023, 113–119).

39   The question whether the notion of dimensionality that I propose to employ in approaching the unity problem is anachronistic is admittedly delicate. In outline, however, the answer is straightforward. Aristotle clearly operates with a notion of dimensionality in the strict sense of the number of extensions and of the corresponding modes of divisibility of a continuous magnitude (e.g. DC I.1, 268a7ff.; Met. V.13, 1020a11–14; Cat. 6, 4b20–24). There are three διαστάσεις (diastaseis). However, it is equally clear that this notion overlaps only partially with the modern concept. For Aristotle, all three dimensions are properties of physical substances qua physical bodies, and in that Aristotelian guise the notion is not, as such, suited to serve as a description of the parts of the soul. Moreover, in Aristotle's philosophy, the relevant genus is μέγεθος (megethos), so that 'dimensions' mark the ways in which a magnitude is extended in one, two, or three directions. By contrast, the modern notion of dimensionality is detached from bodily magnitude and treated as a more general and formal parameter – roughly, the number of degrees of freedom that structure a space of possible states or behaviours, including those of living systems. For discussion of Aristotle's notion of dimensionality, see Whitrow (1955) or Pfeiffer (2018).

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The Role of Happiness in Moral Motivation. A Discussion in Contemporary Ethics

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ABSTRACT*

This paper analyses the role of happiness in moral motivation within the eudaimonistic tradition. It addresses the Aristotelian-Thomistic tension between choosing virtuous action for its own sake and for the sake of *eudaimonia*. Through a critical examination of Josef Seifert's two-motive theory, Jeff D'Souza's altruistic eudaimonism, and Chris Toner's excellence-prior eudaimonism, I argue that Seifert's phenomenological framework provides the most coherent account. It distinguishes between a primary, value-responsive motive directed toward morally relevant goods and a secondary, subordinate desire for true happiness. This dual structure retains the legitimacy of eudaimonistic motivation while avoiding both the self-referentiality characteristic of traditional eudaimonism and the excessive other-centredness of its modern revisions.

——— I. INTRODUCTION

One of the fundamental issues of moral philosophy is the role of the agent's happiness in moral motivation. This issue is arguably left ambiguous by the greatest and most consequential thinkers of the Greek and Latin philosophical traditions: Aristotle and Aquinas. Aristotle repeatedly states that virtuous actions are chosen for their own sake or for the sake of *to kalon* (Aristotle 2019, 1094a18–22, 1097a30–35). However, he *also* lists virtue as a good worth choosing for the sake of *eudaimonia*. Similarly, Aquinas says that bonum honestum (that is, ultimately, moral virtue) is to be pursued both for its own sake *and* for the sake of "a more perfect good", that is, for the sake of happiness (Aquinas 1895, q. 145, a. 1, response to obj. 1).

Over the centuries, many interpreters of Aristotle and Aquinas have tried to explain how it is possible for an X to be desired or pursued both for its own sake and for the sake of something else, and how virtue can be desired both for its own sake and for the sake of happiness as a more comprehensive good. Apparently, these explanations were not convincing enough to silence the critics who claim that pursuing virtue or virtuous action for the sake of the agent´s own happiness illicitly instrumentalises the former for the latter. They contended that such an approach to moral motivation is insufficiently other-centred. In other words, it does not take the well-being of others – or any good other than the well-being of the agent – seriously enough as a good in its own right.

This paper addresses this longstanding objection to substantially eudaimonistic ethical theories, such as those of Aristotle and Aquinas, by presenting and critically discussing accounts of moral motivation developed by contemporary moral philosophers, including both neo-Aristotelians and non-neo-Aristotelians. Rather than offering an alternative interpretation of Aristotle's and Aquinas's arguably ambiguous assertions about choosing virtuous actions or a virtuous life, these accounts address the fundamental ethical issue of how to construct an account of moral motivation that avoids excessive self-concern. In fact, the paper's central discussion of moral motivation broadens the focus even further; how can an account of moral motivation be constructed in such a way as to avoid the dangers of both excessive self-centredness and excessive other-centredness? Thus, the paper relates to the Greek and Latin philosophical tradition by engaging with contemporary ethical discourse to find more satisfactory solutions to fundamental problems that traditional ethical teachings have arguably not always solved.

It starts with Josef Seifert's account of moral motivation. Seifert is known for his prolific philosophical output, spanning epistemology, anthropology, metaphysics, and ethics. While his contributions to epistemology (Seifert 1976a) and metaphysics (Seifert 1989) are more widely recognised, his account of moral motivation is less well-known. It is developed in his book *Was ist und was motiviert eine sittliche Handlung?* (Seifert 1976b), published in English as *The Moral Action: What is it and How is it Motivated?* (Seifert 2017).

Seifert provides a phenomenological and value-realist account of moral action, building on the legacy of Dietrich von Hildebrand. He identifies six motives for moral action. This paper focuses on the first and sixth motives, referring to the first as "primary" and the second as "secondary". I will compare this dual account of moral action with two contemporary virtue ethics accounts of moral motivation: Jeff D'Souza's altruistic eudaimonism and Chris Toner's excellence-prior eudaimonism. Ultimately, the question is which of these three accounts offers the most convincing explanation of moral motivation, both in terms of the motivation behind individual actions and the motivation to lead a virtuous life.

According to Seifert's account of moral motivation, the primary motive for morally good action is the state of affairs that is intended to be realised by the action. For an action to be morally good, the state of affairs that is intended to be realised must have a specific type of importance. Seifert, following Hildebrand, calls it "moral relevance" (Seifert 2017, 54). The secondary motive of moral action is the desire for true happiness (Seifert 2017, 117). This motive is not mentioned by Hildebrand. However, a hint at this motive can be seen in Hildebrand's analysis of the so-called moral consciousness. This analysis entails the idea that to act morally well in the full sense, the agent must not be motivated only by the value at stake. He must also recognise the moral relevance of that value and the moral significance of his action. In

this context Hildebrand says that moral motivation also implies the awareness that to strive for moral goodness is in our ultimate interest, that it is "the real good for us" (Hildebrand 2020, 270–271). However, the move from this hint to the fully formed idea that the pursuit of one's own happiness is a valid, albeit secondary, source of moral motivation is a very significant one. Seifert makes this move. He thus paves the way for an account of moral motivation that is closer to the traditional eudaimonist approach, and which, as I will try to show, can be used to rectify the eudaimonist approach without losing what is legitimate in it.

For the purposes of the following discussion, I will interpret true happiness, which Seifert recognises as a legitimate, albeit subordinate, motive for moral action, as either a superabundant consequence of the agent's moral goodness or an eschatological reward for it. In other words, the secondary motive for morally good action is the realisation that leading a morally good life is the key to true happiness, whether here on earth or in the afterlife. All of the most influential moral philosophers of antiquity and the Middle Ages recognised that there was an intrinsic link between virtue and true happiness. While the Peripatetics and Academics believed that virtue was merely a *necessary* condition for true happiness, the Stoics and Epicureans believed that it was a *sufficient* condition (Reale 1991, 113). Spaemann notes that Augustine and Aquinas expressed more forcefully than the ancient Greeks the conviction that moral integrity need not guarantee a happy existence in this life

in the face of hostile external circumstances or even the possibility of losing rational self-control. As a result, they, like Plato before them, relegate perfect happiness to the afterlife. Nevertheless, even they recognised a more intimate connection between morality and perfect happiness than the former being the means to the latter. It was not until Luther's theology and Kant's moral philosophy that the link between morality and true happiness was made extrinsic (Spaemann 1989, 99–109).

The main contention of my paper is that once we understand that the volitional response to the moral relevance of the state of affairs to be realised by my action and my desire for true happiness through participation in moral goodness are the two essential components of moral motivation, we will be in a position to discern what is true and what is controversial in Jeff D'Souza's altruistic eudaimonism and Chris Toner's excellence-prior eudaimonism. As these labels indicate, both these accounts are eudaimonistic. What makes them particularly interesting is that they both attempt to avoid the excessive self-centredness of moral motivation that is typical of eudaimonistic ethics.

II. THE SELF-ABSORPTION OBJECTION AND ALTRUISTIC EUDAIMONISM

I will begin by looking at the altruistic eudaimonism of Jeff D'Souza. In his dissertation (D'Souza 2017) and subsequent articles (D'Souza 2018, D'Souza 2019, D'Souza 2020), he makes two fundamental claims. First, no contemporary

version of virtue ethics can successfully fend off the "self-absorption objection", that is, the objection that its account of moral motivation is too self-centred. Second, only his own account of moral motivation, that is, altruistic eudaimonism, is able to fend off this objection.

He justifies his first claim by identifying three basic approaches that contemporary proponents of virtue ethics take to the self-absorption objection and by arguing that no one is successful in countering it (D'Souza 2017, 38–67, D'Souza 2018). The strategy of the first approach is to distinguish between beginners on the path to virtue and fully virtuous agents and then to argue that while beginners cultivate moral virtues for reasons stemming from their own happiness, fully virtuous agents act spontaneously from their virtuous dispositions and act for other-centred reasons, such as the moral goodness of an action or the well-being of others.

The problem with this developmental approach is that selfless motives figure in it only on the level of the motivation of occurrent actions, not on the underlying level of the ultimate reasons why a person chooses to maintain a virtuous disposition (D'Souza 2018, 650–651). Therefore, D'Souza concludes that this approach cannot provide a sufficiently convincing response to the self-absorption objection. The pursuit of one's own happiness remains the ultimate reason for acting morally. Although the moral decisions of a perfectly virtuous person are selfless, her ultimate motivation for being a morally good agent is still the regard for her own happiness.

The strategy the second approach uses for fending off the self-absorption objection has two steps. First, one distinguishes between what justifies the virtuous agent's actions from a prudential point of view and what motivates them from a moral point of view. Second, it seeks to demonstrate not only that the moral and the prudential justification can come apart but also that the content of the prudential justification does not undermine the content of the moral justification, leaving the motivation of the virtuous agent intact (D'Souza 2018, 653). D'Souza's objection to this approach is ultimately the same as his objection to the first one. He argues that while this account provides a non-egoistic account of the virtuous agent's occurrent motivation, it fails to provide such an account for the moral motivation at the underlying level, as according to this account too the ultimate reason why the virtuous agent chooses to live and act virtuously is his own *eudaimonia* (the prudential perspective).

The third approach involves reinterpreting the virtuous agent's understanding of *eudaimonia* as being different from self-interest. D'Souza focuses his analysis (and critique) on Chris Toner's version of this approach. According to Toner, we must distinguish between *eudaimonia* in the sense of welfare and *eudaimonia* in the sense of moral perfection. Setting *eudaimonia* in the sense of welfare as the ultimate goal of moral motivation is a form of egoism. However, placing *eudaimonia* in the sense of moral perfection as the ultimate goal of moral striving is not egoistic. Therefore,

prioritising our own *eudaimonia* in the sense of virtuous activity as the ultimate reason for all our moral actions is a standpoint that counters the self-absorption objection.

D'Souza objects to this argument, contending that "when we act virtuously toward others … we think that we ought, morally speaking, to do so primarily for the sake of others, or at the very least, not primarily because doing so is good for us, even if our good is understood in terms of our virtuous activity" (D'Souza 2018, 663). This is because "it appears, prima facie, that there is nothing about the virtuous agent's own *eudaimonia* that justifies making the ultimate end of all her actions her virtuous activity … when the virtuous activity of others … is just as valuable as serving as her ultimate end" (D'Souza 2018, 665).

In conclusion, D'Souza argues that the three strategies developed by the contemporary virtue ethicists to counter the self-absorption objection all ultimately fail. Despite this apparently devastating critique of contemporary virtue ethics in terms of its ability to counter the self-absorption objection, D'Souza still believes he can present a eudaimonistic account of moral motivation that withstands this objection. In order to highlight both of its central features – its eudaimonism and its altruism – he refers to it as altruistic eudaimonism.

Altruistic eudaimonism starts with the picture of a person who has some degree of moral virtue and who subsequently perfects this virtue by asking the Socratic question of how one should live (D'Souza 2017, 108). After serious contemplation, this person realises that human good consists chiefly in a life of excellent moral activity. She then decides and is motivated to cultivate such a life for that very reason (D'Souza 2020, 484). Hence, while the motivation to become truly virtuous does arise from a reflection regarding what type of life one should lead, one does not cultivate or maintain a virtuous disposition because one thinks that doing so is good *for oneself*, but ultimately because one appreciates and understands that human good consists in a life of excellent moral activity.

Note that D'Souza's account of moral motivation is close to Toner's in that it interprets *eudaimonia* as moral perfection. However, unlike Toner, D'Souza claims that (a) there is no reason to consider one's own *eudaimonia* to be more valuable than that of others and (b) it is better to act virtuously than to promote one's own *eudaimonia* if one cannot do both.

▬▬▬ III. ALTRUISTIC EUDAIMONISM AND THE TWO-MOTIVE APPROACH: MORAL MOTIVATION AT THE LEVEL OF OCCURRENT ACTIONS

Let us grant to D'Souza that his account of moral motivation is sufficiently other-centred in terms of both the motivation of occurrent actions and the underlying motives for cultivating a virtuous disposition. But is fending off the self-absorption objection enough to provide an adequate account of moral motivation? Is this a sufficient condition or just a necessary one? It is unlikely to be a sufficient condition, not least because there are multiple other-centred accounts of moral motivation that

cannot be considered to converge. I will now compare the eudaimonistic altruist account of moral motivation with the two-motive account mentioned at the beginning in order to determine the respective merits of each. I will make this comparison at two levels: the level of occurrent motivation and the underlying level, that is, the motivation for cultivating one's virtue.

At the level of occurrent actions D'Souza argues in favour of what he calls "the recognition view" (D'Souza 2017, 69–77). According to this view, the virtuous agent acts virtuously because he recognises the intrinsic, non-relational goodness of the act itself. On the basis of contemporary Aristotelian scholarship and Aristotle's writings, D'Souza argues that this account can be attributed to Aristotle (D'Souza 2017, 83). Unfortunately, he never asks the question what makes an action morally good in itself, so as to motivate a virtuous agent to perform it. He argues only that, according to Aristotle, knowledge of the intrinsic goodness of an action is sufficient motivation for performing it.

By contrast, Hildebrand and Seifert try to explain what motivates one to act morally at the level of occurrent actions. This explanation entails the clarification of what constitutes a morally good action. Here is a brief outline of their approach; they begin with a phenomenological description of moral action as a particular kind of human behaviour. What distinguishes actions from other experiences and behaviours is that they lead to the realisation of states of affairs. States of affairs realised by actions are a

new reality with respect to the actions themselves. They have their own ontological status and usually outlast the actions themselves. Moreover, states of affairs are not only what *results* from actions but also what *motivates* them. It is the value of a particular state of affairs that motivates the agent. What is specific to the *moral* motivation of occurrent actions is that the values of the states of affairs to which the agent responds are not only intrinsically important but also "morally relevant".[1] So, according to Seifert and von Hildebrand, the primary moral motivation at the level of occurrent actions is to realise a morally relevant state of affairs. This contention simultaneously explains what constitutes "the non-relational goodness of the act itself". The moral goodness of an action is largely constituted by the presence of this motivation, although not entirely.

▬ IV. ALTRUISTIC EUDAIMONISM AND THE TWO-MOTIVE APPROACH: MORAL MOTIVATION AT THE UNDERLYING LEVEL

I will now turn to moral motivation at the underlying level, that is the level at

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1   Morally relevant values are those with respect to which our actions become good or bad in a strictly moral sense; that is to say, they become morally good or evil. Failing to respond with enthusiasm to a great work of art, for example, or never opening any of Plato's dialogues, is regrettable, but it is not an omission that would make us morally evil. The paradigmatic example of a morally relevant value is the ontological value of the human person. Loving or hating other people, helping or harming them are classic examples of morally good or evil actions. For a more detailed explanation of this notion, see Cajthaml (2019, 29–30).

which we are motivated to cultivate our moral virtues. In D'Souza's altruistic eudaimonism, this underlying moral motivation of the virtuous agent is to lead a life aiming at morally excellent activity as its final goal. The ultimate justification for this approach is the realisation that the moral perfection of all humans is equally valuable, and therefore there is no legitimate reason to prioritise one's own moral perfection over that of others.

Hildebrand's account of moral motivation at an underlying level is based on the idea that we owe a response not only to the morally relevant values of specific states of affairs, objects, or persons, but also to moral goodness itself. Moreover, according to von Hildebrand, in addition to value-responses of which the existence is limited to actual experience, there are also the so-called "superactual" responses. Love, for example, does not cease to exist the moment it ceases to be currently experienced. In contrast to love, which is a response to the unique and unrepeatable value of a given person, there are also superactual value-responses that are *general*; that is, they are responses to a basic type of value or to the sphere of moral and morally relevant values. According to Hildebrand, such a general response is the "backbone" of each virtue (Hildebrand 2020, 380–381). Like Aristotle's, Hildebrand's moral virtues are habitual dispositions that enable a virtuous person to perform certain types of actions and experience certain emotions. In contrast to Aristotle, however, these "basic moral attitudes", as

Hildebrand calls them, are themselves value-responses that predispose the one who possesses them to respond to the values of particular objects in specific situations, including the volitional value-responses that motivate the agent at the level of occurrent actions.

Hildebrand thus argues that, in moral motivation, every response to the value of a particular object, person, or state of affairs implies a general superactual value-response to moral goodness as such (or to the world of moral values). He writes, for example, that "the man who resists a pressure and endures suffering rather than betray someone responds not only to the value of a human being but also to the moral goodness of this attitude of loyalty or to the moral evil of a betrayal. The moral significance of responding to the value on the object side is present to his mind and plays a decisive role in the motivation of his act. We could say every morally good value-response implies in some way the *general will to be morally good*, to act and behave in a morally right manner" (Hildebrand 2020, 268). However, not every person is awakened to this call of moral goodness. The unconscious man, as Hildebrand calls him, "may in a certain situation accomplish a value-response, he may even act objectively according to the moral call but not because he has grasped the moral significance or because of his will to act morally right" (Hildebrand 2020, 280).

According to Hildebrand, this dependence of the recognition of a value as morally relevant on one's level of "moral consciousness" (or on one's will

to be morally good) does not mean that certain values are not (objectively) morally relevant while others are. It means only that it takes a morally conscious person to recognise the moral relevance of a value, not that the moral relevance of it is constituted by this recognition. He also highlights the unity of an act which is *simultaneously* a response to the morally relevant value and a response to the moral significance of the action for which the morally relevant value calls (Hildebrand 2020, 283).

In summary, according to Hildebrand, the value that motivates an agent to act in a given situation is perceived as morally relevant because the agent perceives it against the backdrop of a deeper, more general value-response: his volitional response to moral goodness as such and his general desire to be morally good. The agent's capacity to respond not only to the value of the intended state of affairs but also to grasp its moral relevance and the moral significance of the intended action is conditioned by his moral consciousness, expressed through his general will to be morally good.

Now let me compare the two accounts and ask which one is a more satisfactory account of moral motivation at the underlying level. One way to tackle this issue is to consider how the two accounts might be described from the viewpoint of the other.

How can we describe Hildebrand's account from D'Souza's perspective? From this perspective, Hildebrand's basic idea – that the moral goodness of the fundamental moral attitude stems from it being a superactual response to moral

goodness itself – cannot be described. D'Souza's account suggests that moral perfection, at the underlying level, can and should be striven for *directly*. According to this account, moral perfection should be the ultimate goal of our moral endeavours. By contrast, Hildebrand's account presupposes that moral goodness cannot be the direct object of our willing. The notion of a value-response implies that moral goodness comes into existence when we respond appropriately to the call of values. Therefore, the primary object of our moral striving, in terms of both occurrent actions and underlying attitudes, is the value itself: the valuable object, the valuable state of affairs, the human person as a bearer of values. From D'Souza's perspective, it seems that Hildebrand's account of moral motivation cannot be adequately described because the latter has no conceptual resources with which to express the idea that moral goodness arises from a value-response at an underlying level.

How can we describe D'Souza's account from the perspective of Hildebrand's account? First, one would distinguish between striving for one's own moral perfection and striving for the moral perfection of others. The former would be unacceptable because it fails to recognise that moral goodness can only arise through actions and attitudes that respond to values. My own moral goodness can never be a legitimate primary motive for my actions or underlying attitudes. Conversely, striving for the moral perfection of others would be recognised as a legitimate and noble motive for both actions and underlying attitudes.

Consider, for example, Socrates' efforts to care for the souls of his fellow-citizens. From the perspective of Hildebrand's account of moral motivation, this is a profoundly different type of moral motivation from striving for one´s own perfection, but from the perspective of D'Souza's account, it is two modifications of the same moral motivation, namely striving for moral perfection. While D'Souza's altruistic account suggests that one should not prioritise one's own moral perfection over that of others simply because it is one's own, Hildebrand's perspective points out the inability of D'Souza's account to articulate the fundamental moral difference between striving for one's own moral perfection and striving for the moral perfection of others. From Hildebrand's perspective, the former is ultimately impossible because one cannot directly intend one's own moral values as the goal of one's actions or attitudes. The latter, however, is possible and is one of the noblest types of moral motivation in terms of both occurrent actions and underlying attitudes. Therefore, it could be argued that Hildebrand's account of moral motivation at the underlying level is superior to D'Souza's because it can articulate its content adequately and highlight its strengths and weaknesses, while the opposite cannot be said of D'Souza's account.

━━━ IV. CONCLUSION

To conclude, I would like to emphasise the importance of the secondary motive in the two-motive account which I derived from Seifert's book on moral motivation. As mentioned earlier, the desire for true happiness, that is, happiness based on moral excellence, is, according to most ancient and medieval philosophers, the primary motive of the virtuous agent. What makes Seifert's account of moral motivation unique and significant is that, unlike most modern philosophers, he recognises the full legitimacy of this motive. At the same time, however, by assigning to this motive a secondary, subordinate role, Seifert's account addresses what modern moral philosophers have always considered to be the main weakness of traditional eudaimonistic ethics' account of moral motivation: its insufficient other-centredness.

The merit of a theoretical explanation of x can often be determined by its ability to identify the strengths and weaknesses of alternative explanations of x. Seifert's two-motive account of moral motivation does this with respect to D'Souza's altruistic eudaimonism and Toner's excellence-prior eudaimonism. We saw that the latter is unable to fend off the self-absorption objection, while the former fails to appreciate that the desire for one's true happiness is a legitimate motive, even at the underlying level of moral motivation. Seifert´s approach shows how both these deficiencies can be eliminated. The excessive self-centredness of excellence-prior eudaimonism can be eliminated by *relegating* the desire for moral self-perfection and happiness based on it to the rank of a *secondary*, subservient motive at both levels, while affirming the other-centred motive as primary at both levels.

The insufficient articulation of the desire for one's own true happiness as a distinct and legitimate motive in altruistic eudaimonism can be eliminated in the same way. By recognising its status as a secondary, subordinate motive, we can acknowledge it as a distinct motive separate from the desire for the moral perfection of others and still fend off the self-absorption objection, which was D'Souza's main concern.

From Seifert's viewpoint we can also understand what caused these deficiencies in the two eudaimonistic accounts. In both cases, the main concern was to interpret one's account of moral motivation as Aristotelian, and thus eudaimonistic. Despite correctly rejecting the interpretation of *eudaimonia* as welfare – as this would render a eudaimonistic account of moral motivation egoistic – Toner could not see any way to remain within the Aristotelian framework other than to assert moral perfection as the ultimate goal of one's striving, even at the underlying level. Had he been primarily concerned with constructing an account of moral motivation that would be faithful to things themselves rather than to Aristotle's approach to ethics, he might have avoided the insufficient other-centredness of his account identified by D'Souza. Similarly, if D'Souza were not primarily concerned with presenting an Aristotelian account of moral motivation, but instead focused on things themselves, he might recognise that when the pursuit of one's own true happiness is made secondary, it does not render moral motivation overly self-centred.

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Was Karl Popper a Civic Republican?

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ABSTRACT*

Karl Popper has hitherto been understood as either a liberal or, at best, as a *sui generis* specimen of socialism. I argue that his political thought bears a remarkable resemblance to what Philip Pettit and Quentin Skinner have dubbed the Italo-Atlantic branch of republicanism. Viewing Popper through a republican lens would reveal that there is a robust and coherent theory behind his attack on the "enemies of the open society". The paper focuses successively on the concept of freedom understood as *nondomination*, on the role of the state and the rule of law, and on democracy. That Popper might be classified "as a republican, in something close to Pettit's sense" has been suggested in passing by Jeremy Shearmur on a handful of occasions. The present article, however, should be the first to focus on the similarities in detail.

Karl Popper was a civic republican, even though he himself was not aware of the fact. That is, he was a civic republican to the extent that his political theory is remarkably similar to what Philip Pettit and Quentin Skinner have dubbed *the Italo-Atlantic branch of republicanism* – a tradition of European political thought which started in antiquity and has been said to have faded out in the nineteenth century (e.g. Martí and Pettit 2010, 40–8 and 24–6). If I am right, it means not only that important features of this tradition survived for longer in Central Europe than in the West, but also that these features were already applied *democratically* (as opposed to the elitism of the older republicanism), much in the way that Pettit has been applying them since the 1990s.

Indeed, other Central European authors such as the interwar Czechoslovak journalist Ferdinand Peroutka or even Joseph Conrad (originally from Poland) could be quoted to support this hypothesis.[1] The present article, however, focuses solely on the analysis of the republican features in Popper.

Jeremy Shearmur – an expert on Popper's political thought (and, in his youth, also Popper's assistant) – has already been suggesting for some time that "Popper might usefully be viewed as a republican, in something close to Pettit's sense" (Shearmur 2001, 37–8;

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1   See especially Peroutka's *Democratic Manifesto*, published in his New York exile in 1959, and Conrad's letter to Bertrand Russell from 23 October 1922 reacting to Russell's political vision for China (now in Russell 2009, 377–8).

Shearmur 2009, note 2; Shearmur 2016, 353). But Shearmur has limited himself to fleeting mentions and, to the best of my knowledge, no one else has yet dealt with the topic.

There have, of course, been works highlighting the idiosyncraticity of Popper's "liberalism". Bryan Magee (1973, 80–1) thought that Popper's political theory provided the best philosophical foundation for democratic socialism. Geoffrey Stokes (1998, 72) argued that it "shares little with the classical liberals" and (2006, 217) that it "departs from liberal minimalism in a number of crucial ways". Stokes (2016) also pointed out the similarities between Popper and Habermas, which include some of the issues in which Pettit cites Habermas as congenial to republicanism (e.g. Pettit 2012, 23, 201; Pettit 2014, 223). Harald Stelzer (2006, 231) praises Popper for "adding some thoughts to the liberal view that enables one to develop a better response to communitarians", while Jeff Kochan (2009, 299) takes this idea even further by calling Popper himself a "liberal communitarian". Malachi H. Hacohen (2016, 47) writes of "socialism *sui generis*" and David Weinstein and Avihu Zakai (2006, 188) even write of "neo-Kantian republicanism". What is most interesting is Donald B. Hutt's (2018, 103) mentioning of Popper alongside Machiavelli as an author who rejects Burkean elitism in favour of a more popular control of government, as well as Rafał Lis' and Christopher Donohue's (2018) suggestion that Popper serves to "breach the gap [sic]" between the philosophy of science and republicanism of Madison and Rousseau.

The present article, however, should be the first to focus in detail on the similarities between Popper and the so-called *Italo-Atlantic branch of republicanism*.

For reasons of space and clarity, I have decided to compare Popper chiefly with Philip Pettit. I consider Pettit the most important among contemporary non-collectivist republicans, and Popper has most in common with him. I therefore refer to the rest of the tradition only insofar as it differs from Pettit. (I *do not* think that Pettit is just another liberal in disguise, and I point out the differences in what follows.)

The article has six sections. The first three provide a summary of Pettit (and Skinner) on the following: freedom as *nondomination*, the role of the state and the *rule of law*, and democracy. The latter three consist of a detailed examination of Popper's views on the same issues, and their comparison with Pettit's, and, occasionally, those of other republicans.

The reader may be surprised by the unusually high number of quotations. This is because the language Popper used is a crucial part of the evidence for his republicanism.

1. "ITALO-ATLANTIC" REPUBLICANISM

1.1. FREEDOM AS NONDOMINATION

We ought to think of freedom not as non-interference, but as non-domination. That is the core message of Philip Pettit's republicanism. The concept of freedom as *nondomination* is best understood from the vivid examples given by Pettit and his fellow-republican Quentin Skinner:

Nora in Ibsen's *Doll's House* is worshipped by her husband Torvald. She can do whatever she wants, spend money on whatever she wants, go wherever she wants. She is perfectly free in the sense of *noninterference*. But she is not free in the sense of *nondomination*, because – as the play takes place in the nineteenth century – her ability to act as she wishes depends almost entirely on her husband's will. Should *he* change his mind about Nora, he can take all her latitude of choice away and there would be nothing she or anyone else could do about it. (e.g. Pettit 2014, xiii–xiv)

In ancient Roman comedies, one finds slave characters who boast that because their master is either benevolent or stupid, they can do whatever they desire, and are, in fact, freer than citizens themselves. The Romans considered this hilarious, since it was obvious for them that the master (*dominus*) can chain or beat his slaves any time he wishes. Unlike citizens, the slaves were not *sui iuris*, "in their own right" or "their own masters"; they were "within the power of another", *in aliena potestate*. (e.g. Skinner 1998, 40–1)

In the republican lexicon, *being dominated* means being *subjected to the will of others*, while freedom as *nondomination* stands for "a condition under which a person is more or less immune, and more or less saliently immune, to interference on an arbitrary basis" (Pettit 2014, xv; Pettit 1997, vii–viii).

That one is to be immune *saliently* is important for obvious reasons: a Roman citizen was protected primarily by the common knowledge that should anyone dare to treat him as a slave, punishment would follow.

Although *nondomination* differs from liberal *noninterference*, it is still a version of what Isiah Berlin (2002, 166–217) labelled *negative freedom*. It does not differ from *noninterference* in the sense that it would dictate any *positive* content. It is essentially non-paternalistic, because it does not prescribe any one way of life – it only provides for everyone to choose her or his own way. (Pettit 2014, 66–7; Martí and Pettit 2010, 154–5) It is thus a *gateway good*: although many may find it desirable in itself, it also serves as an invaluable means of pursuing other goods and values (Pettit 2014, viii, xix).

Pettit also agrees with Berlin when the latter criticises the (originally) Hobbesian notion of freedom and says that for a person to be called free it is not enough if among several doors, only the one which she chooses to enter is unlocked. Pettit, however, takes this to a higher level; not only must all the doors be unlocked, there must also not be a doorman who would be able to decide arbitrarily to lock one of the doors. (Pettit 2014, 39–46)

Finally, *nondomination* is "a dynamic ideal that is always rich in further possibilities of extrapolation and development, not a static ideal that is tied mechanically to a fixed pattern of institutional life". This dynamism allows it to "articulate diverse grievances" with respect to local customs and level of development (it is not a utopic ideal). (Pettit 1997, 146–7; see also Martí and Pettit 2010, 153–4)

1.2. THE STATE AND ITS ROLE, THE LAW AND ITS RULE

For two millennia, *nondomination* was the prevalent notion of freedom in the West, but it was marginalised by the liberal and utilitarian concept of *noninterference* and by the Romantic concept of *self-realisation* – collective or individual. The aim of Pettit's and Skinner's neo-republicanism is to revive the notion of freedom as *nondomination* with all the consequences such a revival would have in the contemporary society which no longer recognises slaves and masters, serfs and lords, or the supremacy of one race over another and of men over women.

Because all individuals are to be protected against the arbitrary will of others, the state is obliged to provide "a public system of social, medical, and judicial security – and a form of financial security – for everyone" (Pettit 2014, xv–xvi, xviii, 87, 105). Without such a protective system, employees can be blackmailed by their employers to do things they would not do were they not risking starvation or the loss of medical care for their children (*Ibid*. and *ibid*., 17–8). Republicanism does not demand *substantive equality* (that is, that everyone would have the same amount of goods) but it does demand *equality in the interactions* of people. If a society is to be perceived as free in the republican sense, it has to pass *the eyeball test*: "people will be adequately resourced and protected in the exercise of their basic liberties to the extent that, absent excessive timidity or the like, they are enabled by the most demanding local standards to look one another in the eye

without reason for fear or deference." (*Ibid*., 98–101)

Apart from physical and social security, *the eyeball test* obviously demands something else as well. It demands that this kind of "entrenchment register as a matter of common awareness. Everyone must be aware that you are secured in this way, everyone must be aware that this is a matter of general awareness, and so on" (*Ibid*., 57, 199). This intersubjective recognition would be guaranteed, in the famous phrase of the old republicans, by the "empire of laws and not of men" (Harrington 1992, 8, 20–1; Livy 1919, 218). This, indeed, seems to be the most characteristic theme of the republican tradition. It is the idea behind the concept of the *mixed constitution* from Polybius to the eighteenth-century British thinkers.

1.3. DEMOCRACY AS CONTESTATION

In today's republicanism, the *mixed-constitution* ideal has been replaced by the *separation of powers* combined with a specific concept of democracy. Though it intervenes in people's lives, the government does not dominate "so long as the people affected by the interference share equally in controlling the form that it takes." (Pettit 2014, xx)

In the setting of Ibsen's *Doll's House*, women did not yet have the right to vote. Nora is thus "doubly dominated", as she has neither an exit choice, nor a voice in the nature of her legal condition. "She suffers private domination at the hands of Torvald, and she suffers public domination at the hands of the law."

(Pettit 2016, 10) However, for a government not to dominate, it "requires more than making the state's decisions with a simple majority, since a majority-based system might marginalise some individuals and effectively deny them a share in control". It requires "regular courts and special tribunals as well as ombudsmen, equality commissioners, and other watchdog agencies." (Pettit 2014, 111–2, 124–5)

It is important to distinguish Pettit's and Skinner's republicanism from the republicanism of Rousseauian origin. In sharp contrast to the latter, the former embraces "normative individualism: the view that it is only the interests of individual human beings, not the interests of any agencies or bodies that they create, which should dictate political arrangements" (*Ibid*., 223). And unlike Rousseauian republicanism, it argues that the reins of ultimate power, in Madison's (2003, 234) image, should not be held in a single pair of hands: not the hands of a single individual, of course, but also not the hands of a single corporate body, such as Rousseau's majoritarian assembly of citizens.

▬▬ 2. KARL POPPER
▬▬ 2.1. FREEDOM AS NONDOMINATION?

Popper is misrepresented in a variety of ways. Because he associated with the Vienna Circle, he has been labelled a positivist – which, quite obviously, he was not (Hacohen 2016, 49–59). Similarly, he has been labelled a right-wing champion of antisocialism because he was a founding member of the Mont Pèlerin Society, made friends with F. A. Hayek, and declared himself "a liberal".

One should not make judgements on the basis of such *prima facie* evidence. At the sixth meeting of the Mont Pèlerin Society (Venice, September 1954), Popper read a paper in which he said that because *any* "irresponsible form of power" is "particularly dangerous from the liberal point of view", the "individual needs the powerful protection of the state" (now in Popper 2002, 467–76). He then proceeded to provide a rationale, which, in fact, cannot really be labelled otherwise than *republican*:

> In order to show the necessity of the state I do not appeal to Hobbes' *homo-homini-lupus* view of man. On the contrary, its necessity can be shown even if we assume that *homo homini felis*, or even that *homo homini angelus* – in other words, even if we assume that, because of their gentleness, or angelic goodness, nobody ever harms anybody else. In such a world there would still be weaker and stronger men, and the weaker ones would have no legal right to be tolerated by the stronger ones, but would owe them gratitude for their being so kind as to tolerate them. Those (whether strong or weak) who think this an unsatisfactory state of affairs, and who think that every person should have a right to live, and that every person should have a legal claim to be protected against the power of the strong, will agree that we need a state that protects the rights of all. (*Ibid*., 471)

Correspondingly, Popper was never a friend of the "free market". Although, as early as 1927, he concluded that "Kant, not Marx, showed the way to socialism" (Hacohen 2016, 46), he continued to hold Marx in high esteem even when criticising him in *The Open Society*. Arguably, what the Popper of the 1940s admires in Marx is precisely what is republican in him (cf. Pettit 1997, 141–3; Pettit 2014, 18–20; Skinner 1998, note 3). In this vein, Popper writes approvingly that Marx "hated capitalism, not for its accumulation of wealth, but for its oligarchical character; he hated it because in this system wealth means political power in the sense of power over other men" (Popper 2013, 405). He further writes that "under the system of unrestrained capitalism [...] the economically strong is still free to bully one who is economically weak, and to rob him of his freedom [...] for those who possess a surplus of food can force those who are starving into a 'freely' accepted servitude, without using violence". Because of this, the maxim that "[n]obody should be at the *mercy* of others [...] must be applied to the economic realm also".[2]

Weinstein and Zakai (2006, 201–2) use these Marxian passages to criticise Charles Taylor's view (1958, 78) that Popper's theory is an apology for the *negative* concept of liberty. But they are wrong. The passages in question do speak for the *negative* concept, only for a concept that requires the absence, not necessarily of *interference* – the state interferes with people even in protecting them – but of *domination*.

Pace Stelzer (2006), Kochan (2009), and others, I do not think that Popper can be called a *left* liberal either. In fact, it is hard to place him *anywhere* in the liberal camp.

Confronted with the variety of human longings and values, liberals typically adopt one of the following approaches: (a) declaring the values of liberty and private property "natural rights" that trump all other values (Nozick and most other right liberals), (b) declaring a somewhat wider set of values and longings "reasonable", thus denouncing all the other values and longings (Rawls and many other left liberals; also Berlin, whose "pluralistic" set of values is limited), (c) broadening the "natural rights" to include not just liberty, but also e.g. equality, safeguards against material privation, and the like (another large set of left liberals).

Liberals – from Bentham to Berlin to contemporary value-shapers in Marvel Studios – also typically do not see a necessary contradiction between liberty and power. In their lens, a "despot" like "Frederick the Great or [...] Joseph II" can leave "his subjects a wide area of liberty" – wider than "many an earlier or later democracy".[3]

Compare with this, first, Popper's practical and democratic approach,

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2   *Ibid.*, 332–3. Unless indicated otherwise, the italics are those of the author of the quoted text.

3   Berlin 2002, 176. Or, as Bentham's associate William Paley – very influential in his time – put it: "the edicts of a despotic prince" can provide for liberty better than "the resolution of a popular assembly" (Paley 1825, 166).

which, instead of prescribing what people should value, prescribes policies that are compatible with already "widely accepted moral and political creeds" (Popper 2012, 122). Second, see his firm conviction that "it is dangerous to let oneself be inspired by the wish to make people happy" and that the "benevolent tyrant" is thus even "more dangerous than the malevolent tyrant" (Popper 2012, 125; see also Popper 2002, 465 for a critique of utilitarianism on the same basis). The second feature is rather obviously republican; as for the first, it often might not be present in the writings of historical republican authors, but Philip Pettit is quite clear that he does not want to dictate any positive values to people (Pettit 2014, 71, 165).

Most importantly, though, unlike liberals, Popper was aware of the connection between freedom and power. In a very republican spirit, he calls for the science of "the logic of anti-power politics, i.e. the *logic of freedom*" (which, according to him, "is hardly understood yet") (Popper 2013, 636). Probably on this basis, he also draws a link between liberty, equality, and security (*ibid.*, 86), which is simply "striking" for some of the more liberal commentators on him (Hayes 2009, 72). Of these three, however, freedom underlines the other two – it is, in Pettit's term, a *gateway good*:

> We must plan for freedom, and not only for security, if for no other reason than that only freedom can make security secure. [...] And if freedom is lost, everything is lost, including 'planning'. For why should plans for

the welfare of the people be carried out if the people have no power to enforce them? (Popper 2013, 398 and 338)

Freedom is a *gateway good* not only for equality and security, but for most of the other values as well (cf. Popper 2012, 336). As already mentioned, Popper regards any attempt to make all people (or *a* people) happy to be extremely dangerous. On this basis, he condemns utilitarianism as well as socialism and liberalism as utopian. In his eyes, people simply differ too much in what they regard as happiness and there is no rational way to tell which happiness has priority. However, people often easily agree on what they find unacceptable. And this can often (though not always) be formulated in terms of freedom. (Popper 2012, 118–31; Popper 2002, 452–466; Shearmur 2016, 360; Weinstein and Zakai 2006, 203)

To be sure, Popper became less radical in his politics with time. Afraid of what he saw as persisting *historicism* in socialist theories and repelled by the growing power of bureaucrats (not only in the Eastern Bloc, but also in the West), he gradually moved nearer to classical liberalism (cf. esp. Popper in Schilpp 1974, 1162 and Popper 2012, 241). He also came, as Shearmur (2001, 37) puts it, "to the conclusion that liberty and equality were not, in fact, compatible, [...] in the face of this favouring liberty". Still, "he maintained consistently into his old age" the view that people have to be protected from *laissez-faire* approaches, as in his eyes, such a protection was a protection of the "freedom of the individual from

economic exploitation" (*Ibid*.; see also Shearmur 2016, 356–7).

From time to time Popper comes awfully close to the distinction between *noninterference* and his own view on liberty. Of his proposed theory of *protectionism*,[4] he writes that "though liberal, it has nothing to do with the *policy of strict non-intervention*" (2013, 106). The reason he gives for this is even more stunning:

> ... the alleged clash between freedom and security, that is, a security guaranteed by the state, turns out to be a chimera. For there is no freedom if it is not secured by the state; and conversely, only a state which is controlled by free citizens can offer them any reasonable security at all. (*Ibid*.)

But perhaps the most striking example appears three pages earlier in a conjunction of two sentences, which suggests that *freedom*, or at least the *protection of freedom*, involves *not living at the mercy of another*:

> I demand protection for my own freedom and for other people's. I do not wish to live at the mercy of anybody who has the larger fists or the bigger guns. (Popper, 2013, 103; see also Popper 2012, 62–71, 67)

To be sure, Popper often also uses the term *freedom* in the sense of non-interference. He obviously does not precede Pettit in realising that non-domination is

something distinct from non-interference and in conceptualising it thus. Nevertheless, Popper's theory often *treats* freedom in a way very similar to the republican tradition. And even when it does not, the outcome is still quite "republican":

> What do we really mean when we speak of 'Justice'? [...] I think that most of us, especially those whose general outlook is humanitarian, mean something like this: (*a*) an equal distribution of the burden of citizenship, i.e. of those limitations of freedom which are necessary in social life; (*b*) equal treatment of the citizens before the law, provided, of course, that (*c*) the laws show neither favour nor disfavour towards individual citizens or groups or classes; (*d*) impartiality of the courts of justice; and (*e*) an equal share in the advantages (and not only in the burden) which membership of the state may offer to its citizens. (Popper 2013, 86)

With these points established, it is time to move to the role Popper prescribes for the state.

2.2. THE STATE AND ITS ROLE, THE LAW AND ITS RULE

As Shearmur (1996, 102) summarises it, according to Popper, "the role of the state should be the protection of the liberty of citizens – including liberty from economic exploitation – and the relief of avoidable suffering", while the "latter is to be understood in fairly generous terms – including the provision of access to higher education, and the remedying of injustice".

4   See the next section.

Popper called this *protectionism*. It is a view on the role of the state derived from his (republican-like) concept of freedom, or, as Shearmur (1996, 103) puts it, it is "a concern for the liberty of the individual, widely interpreted".

Popper (2013, 106) writes that "any kind of freedom is clearly impossible unless it is guaranteed by the state". Then he goes on:

> A certain amount of state control in education, for instance, is necessary, if the young are to be protected from a neglect which would make them unable to defend their freedom, and the state should see that all educational facilities are available to everybody. (*Ibid*.)

But *quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* If the state's control over education is itself uncontrolled, writes Popper (*ibid*.), education might easily become indoctrination which defies freedom. Popper concludes with the markedly republican passage quoted already in the previous section: "there is no freedom if it is not secured by the state; and conversely, only a state which is controlled by free citizens can offer them any reasonable security at all". (*Ibid*.)

Both Pettit (1997, 101) and Popper (2013, 106–7) reject all attempts to theorise about the essence or quasi-eschatological purpose of the state. As the latter puts it, instead of asking "How did the state originate, and what is the origin of political obligation? We should rather put our question in this way: What do we demand from a state?" (Popper 2013, 104)

Popper realises that various people may have various answers to this question. But, like Pettit (1997, 130–47), he hopes to persuade most of them that there exists a certain minimal demand everybody should be willing to adopt. Part of it has already been quoted; it is the demand for a state where no one would "live at the mercy of anybody who has the larger fists or the bigger guns". But Popper goes further:

> Once the socialist contention is admitted that one who is economically stronger may bully and blackmail another who is economically weaker, just as if he were using physical intimidation, the liberal is bound to admit that the prevention of such things is a legitimate function of the state. (Popper 2012, 126)

This is one reason why Popper described himself not as *a socialist* but as *a liberal*, but it is not the only one. Most of the socialists he knew (especially during his youth in Vienna) were Marxists, and as such, they believed that they had understood the course of the history. As Hacohen (2016, 47) vividly describes, there were two moral reasons why Popper could not stand the Marxists' *historicist* hubris: on one hand, they were willing to sacrifice their very real contemporaries for a conjectured future; on the other, "their constant effort to interpret and predict the course of history, rather than change it, encouraged the workers' passivity and discouraged serious anti-fascist resistance".

It is, though, perhaps not mentioned often enough that beneath Popper's famous attack on *historicism* there is also a fundamental difference between his and Marx's notions of power. For Marx, Popper writes, "the real power lies in the evolution of machinery; next in importance is the system of economic class-relationships; and the least important influence is that of politics". According to Popper, the "direct opposite" is true. It is the political power which is fundamental (for "it is only the active intervention of the state – the protection of property by laws backed by physical sanctions – which makes of wealth a potential source of power"). (Popper, 2013, 334–6; see also Popper 2012, 227)

And because political power is fundamental, it is possible to "make laws to limit exploitation" as well as to "insure the workers (or better still, all citizens) against disability, unemployment, and old age" (Popper 2013, 334). Economic power is not "the root of all evil"; "*any* form of uncontrolled power" is evil:

> Money as such is not particularly dangerous. It becomes dangerous only if it can buy power, either directly, or by enslaving the economically weak who must sell themselves in order to live. (Popper 2013, 336–7)

How wide, then, shall the area of *protectionism* be? The answer is: quite wide, even in Popper's more conservative later years. In 1972, he said in an interview that one of the two key features of an open society is "institutions [...] for the protection of freedom and the protection of the poor and the weak" (the other feature being "free debate and especially debate about the wisdom or otherwise of governmental decisions") (Popper 2012, 275–87, 277). Perhaps his strongest argument against *laissez-faire* comes from *The Open Society*, though:

> ... the idea of a free market is paradoxical. If the state does not interfere, then other semi-political organisations such as monopolies, trusts, unions, etc., may interfere, reducing the freedom of the market to a fiction. (Popper 2013, 712)

"On the other hand," however, USSR-style wholescale control of the economy is equally paradoxical, since "without a carefully protected free market, the whole economic system must cease to serve its only rational purpose, that is, to *satisfy the demands of the consumer*" (*Ibid*.).

Popper was famously sceptical of all utopian plans (be they communist, socialist, or liberal). It is important to stress, though, that he did "not criticise the ideal by claiming that an ideal can never be realised". What he criticised as utopian was "the reconstruction of society as a whole, i.e. very sweeping changes whose practical consequences are hard to calculate, owing to our limited experiences". (Popper 2013, 151)

Popper's famous attack on utopianism was not meant to discourage us from attempts to change the social world. Its aim was to force us to focus on concrete "social evils, that is to say, [...] social conditions under which many men are suffering". This is preferable for even piecemeal

attempts to maximise happiness, because unlike happiness, suffering is usually indisputable: "Those who suffer can judge for themselves, and the others can hardly deny that they would not like to change places." (*Ibid.*, 149) Suffering is, however, to be understood rather broadly, since among Popper's examples of its relief we find "health and unemployed insurance, for instance, or arbitration courts, or anti-depression budgeting, or educational reform" (*Ibid.*).

Like Pettit (2014, 66–7; Martí and Pettit 2010, 154–5), Popper was of the opinion that, as Shearmur (2001, 40) puts it, "promotion of others' positive well-being [is] a matter for individual private initiative – not least because one could always stop being friends with someone who would not take no for an answer, while it was a lot harder to do this to government". The state's role consists solely of eliminating suffering – including the suffering of living at the mercy of another.[5]

At one point in *The Open Society*, Popper writes: "State intervention should be limited to what is really necessary for the protection of freedom" (Popper 2013, 338). Given what I have written so far about the extent of his *protectionism*, this sentence does not really make sense unless one takes Popper as understanding freedom as something similar to the republican *nondomination*.

Indeed, Shearmur was understandably puzzled in 1996 when he wrote *The Political Thought of Karl Popper*. He also saw, then, a contradiction between Popper's *protectionism* and his Kantian stress on the autonomy of each individual; if based on the latter, some of the obvious duties connected with *protectionism* seemed to Shearmur "certainly not to be morally obligatory" (Shearmur 1996, 104).

As with freedom, however, this contradiction disappears if one looks at the issue through a republican lens: There are no such things as independently existing rights – they only exist via a state. And since the desired right is freedom as *nondomination* (or "liberty of the individual, widely interpreted"), the individual is required to participate in the endeavour of securing it for everyone. Now, it seems plausible to say that Kantian autonomy in Popper's eyes is equal to something similar to *nondomination*. If it is relegated to being no more than an empty phrase, it has to be entrenched by the state and demanding of obligations on the side of citizens (Q.E.D.).

Indeed, it seems that Shearmur himself has since arrived at a similar explanation. When he discusses Popper's *protectionism* in Shearmur 2016 (361), he briefly mentions John Stuart Mill's *Subjection of Women* and Jeremy Waldron (1993) on the concept of autonomy in the republican tradition.

Moving to the *rule-of-law* topic, Popper insists on the importance of having an "institutional 'legal framework'". As he says, it brings "order and rational predictability into the social world in

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5 For Pettit's critique of utopianisms (including those of Rawls and the luck-egalitarians) and his arguments for piecemeal reforms (both very much Popper-like) see Pettit 1997, 124, 146–7; Martí and Pettit 2010, 151, 155–7; Pettit 2012, 126, 203; Pettit 2014, 107–8.

which we live". (Popper 2002, 175–6) It is, of course, also a necessary condition for justice, understood as

> (*a*) an equal distribution of the burden of citizenship, i.e. of those limitations of freedom which are necessary in social life; (*b*) equal treatment of the citizens before the law, provided, of course, that (*c*) the laws show neither favour nor disfavour towards individual citizens or groups or classes; (*d*) impartiality of the courts of justice; and (*e*) an equal share in the advantages (and not only in the burden) which membership of the state may offer to its citizens. (Popper 2013, 86)

Popper sees a "fundamental difference between the two types of legislation, viz. the one that establishes general rules of conduct, and the one that gives the government discretionary powers" (Popper 2013, 694). One of the passages which he found most abhorrent in Plato is *The Statesman*, 293c–e, where it is said that good statesmen are good statesmen "[w]hether they happen to rule by law or without law, over willing or unwilling subjects" – since, as Stelzer (2006, 236) puts it, "Popper takes it as an anthropological fact that human beings are susceptible to corruption by power".

For Popper, the "fight against tyranny" equals the attempt to safeguard humanitarian and egalitarian principles "by the institutional means of a legislation rather than by the benevolence of persons in power" (Popper 2013, 548–9). What is paramount for the preservation

of freedom, he says, is to design "institutions for preventing even bad rulers from doing too much damage", which is to say to "guard against […] arbitrariness" and "discretionary powers". Thus, for example, a "law establishing that a citizen's misuse of his property should be punished by its forfeiture will be incomparably less dangerous than one which gives the rulers, or the servants of the state, discretionary powers of requisitioning a citizen's property". The main reason why the first of these methods is preferable is that there can be "democratic control" over it. Furthermore, only the first method "makes it possible to make adjustments in the light of discussion and experience". And, finally, when the "legal framework […] is altered, allowances can be made, during a transitional period, for those individuals who have laid their plans in the expectation of its constancy". (Popper 2013, 339–40; see Pettit 2019 for the very same argument, albeit used in a more specific context.)

"The use of discretionary powers," on the other hand,

> is liable to grow quickly, once it has become an accepted method, since adjustments will be necessary, and adjustments to discretionary short-term decisions can hardly be carried out by institutional means. This tendency must greatly increase the irrationality of the system, creating in many the impression that there are hidden powers behind the scenes, and making them susceptible to the conspiracy theory of society with all its consequences – heresy hunts,

national, social, and class hostility. (*Ibid.*, 340–1)[6]

Popper is aware that defending the rule of law might often seem like defending the *status quo*.[7] But that is not what he wishes for. What he says is "that the *status quo* should not be changed by violent means, but only according to law, by compromise or arbitration, except where there is no legal procedure for its revision" (Popper 2013, 105). This necessarily brings us to the topic of democracy and contestation.

▬ 2.3. DEMOCRACY AND CONTESTATION

Democracy is crucial for freedom, as Popper claims, because the very "question of the limitations of freedom" has to be open for public discussion – "without the stimulus of political problems and political struggles of this kind, the citizens' readiness to fight for their freedom would soon disappear, and with it, their freedom" (*Ibid.*, 106).

However, democracy is *not* an end in itself, only a means (essential, as it is) for freedom. "In fact, all that can be said for democracy is that we know of no better form of government to safeguard freedom" (Popper 2012, 240–2).

In this regard, Popper is at odds with communitarian republicans such

as Michael Sandel or Charles Taylor (for whom democracy *is* an end in itself). But he is in perfect accordance with Philip Pettit (1997, 8; 2014, 145) and with Quentin Skinner's (1998, esp. 31–6, 54, 67) narrative of the older republican tradition.

The same, I believe, can be said about what Popper found objectionable in "the totalitarian, the monolithic, the closed society":

The citizen exists, and is used, for the benefit of the state; and the welfare of the state and its power serves as a justification for every act of violence. Any criticism is treated not merely as treason, but as sacrilege. The leader is worshipped as a demigod. He is almighty or very nearly so, and all power flows from his will to his henchmen, who have to prove their worth by flattery, submission, and by being more ruthless than even the demi-god himself in the persecution of the dissident, the suspect, the lukewarm, and the scapegoats.
The secret police are there not so much to discover plots against the government, as to prevent people from daring even to think of opposing it. Their task is to extract usually fictitious confessions or denunciations, thus making people distrust one another. Nobody can be sure that he won't be denounced, arrested, questioned, tortured, imprisoned, deported. (Popper 2012, 244)

Even an autocracy, though, cannot escape one basic principle: "*All long-term politics are institutional.* [...] The principle

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6   In nowadays republicanism, *discretionary* is employed as a term that is interchangeable with *arbitrary* (though less common) – see e.g. Pettit 1997, 186 or Pettit 2014, 117, 217–8.

7   This point, after all, is made not only by Marx but also by Tocqueville (1991, part 2, chap. 8), and Popper had read them both – cf. Popper 2013, 149.

of leadership does not replace institutional problems by problems of personnel, it only creates new institutional problems [such as] *the task of selecting the future leaders*." It is therefore "a mistake" to think that the opposition between democracy and autocracy "corresponds to that between institutionalism and personalism". (Popper 2013, 119–20)

Just as autocracy cannot (in the long run at least) do without institutions, democracy cannot be wholly impersonal. It will, for example, "work fairly well in a society which values freedom and tolerance, but not in a society which does not understand these values". It "may help to preserve freedom, but it can never *create* freedom if the individual citizen does not care for it". (Popper 2012, 243) In general:

> "Institutions are like fortresses. They must be well designed *and* manned." (Popper 2013, 120)

A political theorist must thus face two important problems. On the one hand, there is the question of how to "give a superior chance to those persons (if there are any) who intend to use the institutions for their 'proper' social purpose" (Popper 2002, 179). On the other hand, there is the "most fundamental problem of all politics: the control of the controller, of the dangerous accumulation of power represented in the state" (Popper 2013, 337).

One of the main reasons why Popper criticised Marxists was that they "never realised the full significance of democracy as the only known means to achieve this control [of the controller]. [...] They

did not realise that *all* power, and political power at least as much as economic power, is dangerous. Thus they retained their formula of the dictatorship of the proletariat." (*Ibid*., 337–8)

In Popper's story, Marx was motivated by the most noble idea – the idea of universal freedom (including freedom from economic domination) – but he was deluded by Hegel in two important ways. One was already mentioned: the belief that he can understand and predict the course of history (what Popper called *historicism*). The other is what Popper called "the *theory of (unchecked) sovereignty*". It is an assumption "that he who has the power can, very nearly, do what he wills, and especially that he can strengthen his power, and thereby approximate it further to an unlimited or unchecked power". (Popper 2013, 115) But this theory, says Popper, is both wrongheaded and undesirable.

It is wrongheaded, because, in reality, no power is ever absolute or totally unrestrained:

> So long as one man cannot accumulate enough physical power in his hands to dominate all others, just so long must he depend upon his helpers. Even the most powerful tyrant depends upon his secret police, his henchmen and his hangmen. This dependence means that his power, great as it may be, is not unchecked, and that he has to make concessions, playing one group off against another. (*Ibid*., 116)

But does this mean that there is, in fact, no difference between democracy

and autocracy? That because a tyrant must rely on a large number of people to keep himself in power, he is restricted in the same way as the government of a democratic state? Of course, it does not.

> For even if the tyrant is forced to bribe a certain section of the population, to grant them economic or other advantages, this does not mean that he is forced *by this section*, or that this section has the power to claim and to enforce these advantages as their right. If there are no *institutions* in existence enabling that section to enforce its influence, the tyrant may withdraw the benefits enjoyed by this section and seek support from another one. (*Ibid*., 706)

This is why *the theory of (unchecked) sovereignty* is undesirable. A dictatorship of any kind cannot safeguard freedom, be it the dictatorship of the proletariat or of Plato's philosophers: in the so-called republic of Plato, Popper says, the "control of the master class, its arbitrary powers, and its fierceness, through the opposing force of the ruled, is out of the question, for the superiority of the master class must remain unchallenged". (*Ibid*., 50)

It is very interesting that when discussing *the theory of (unchecked) sovereignty*, Popper (2013, 115) mentions two authors apart from Plato, Hegel, and Marx. He mentions Jean Bodin, the archenemy of republicans of old (Pettit 2012, 189–90, 220–5; Pettit 2014, 12, 154, 219), and he mentions Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who, according to Pettit, is to blame for twisting the original

nondomination-oriented republicanism into the *general-will*-oriented theory leaning towards totalitarianism. (Pettit 2014, 11–3, 132–3, 147, and especially Pettit 2013) In fact, Popper (2013, 561) believed that "Rousseau was greatly influenced by Plato".

In Popper's view, "Democracy cannot be fully characterized as the rule of the majority, although the institution of general elections is most important." The reason is rather trivial: "The majority of those who are less than 6 ft. high may decide that the minority of those over 6ft. shall pay all taxes." (Popper 2013, 368)

Democracy, first and foremost, requires "institutions for the protection of the individual from the benevolence of tyrants" (*Ibid*., 707). It is thus necessary "to replace the question: *Who should rule?* by the new question: *How can we so organise political institutions that bad or incompetent rulers can be prevented from doing too much damage?*" (*Ibid*., 115).

Popper saw the replacement of the core question as his main contribution to political philosophy (Hayes 2009, 73). Almost all his practical political proposals are, in fact, attempts to answers the new problem as he formulated it (Shearmur 2016, 364). He believed that even "progress towards more equality can be safeguarded only by the institutional control of power" (Popper 2013, 370).

He also believed that the control of the rulers is best achieved "by balancing their powers against other powers", which would make "anti-democratic experiments too costly" (*ibid*., 116, 371) – "a kind of political tight-rope performance"

(Popper 2012, 241) which he often called *checks and balances* (e.g. *ibid.* or Popper 2013, 116, 120, 369). Despite the term, though, I do not think that he had in mind the American system of *strong separation of powers*. He is certainly not guilty of what Bruce Ackerman (2000) calls *the Madisonian hope* (that politicians would avoid causing deadlocks). According to Lis and Donohue (2018, 82), he even thought that if the system "causes stagnation or strife" it is "an error" requiring an "adjust[ment]". Indeed, Popper's 1988 article for *The Economist* seems to suggest that what he had in mind when speaking about the "checks and balances" was rather post-1688 Britain, in which "Royal legitimacy was no longer a reliable principle, nor was the rule of the people", the citizens "became dubious about abstract principles; and the Platonic problem 'Who should rule?' was no longer seriously raised" (in Popper 2012, 360–9, 362–3).

How can a system where *the people* are not guaranteed rule be called *democracy*? The answer relies upon a distinction between the *rule of the people* and *rule on the people's terms* under which the (ordinary) people would be guaranteed enough power to *contest* the decisions of the government. I am referring, of course, to the title of Philip Pettit's book (2012), but I am of the opinion that Popper had something similar in mind when thinking about democracy. In fact, he pre-dates Josiah Ober with the theory that *democracy* in the fifth century B.C. meant not that *the people* had a *monopoly* on the government, but that ordinary people were *enabled* to participate in

government.[8] *The people*, or rather (in a more Popperian fashion) ordinary citizens, thus become the most important of the powers which are to balance one another. Indeed, he writes of the "*system of checks and balances*, which is also called 'Democracy'" (Popper 2012, 241) and says again that "... the one really important thing about democracy, [is] that it checks and balances power" (Popper 2013, 369). His realistic political ideal is thus very much akin to that of the great republican thinker Machiavelli, as expressed in the *Discourses on Livy*. (In this regard Popper is much more like Machiavelli, or indeed Pettit, for whom *the people* is the most important of the balancing powers, than like Aristotle, Polybius, or many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century republicans, for whom it is simply one of the components of their *mixed constitution* ideals – one of rather dubious importance and even more dubious capability to decide.)

Again, Popper says, the balance of powers is something that Marx and his followers did not understand.[9] Through their teaching of inevitable class oppression (basically asking "who should be the tyrants? The capitalists or the workers?"), the "Marxist parties [are] *making the workers suspicious of democracy*" and thus simultaneously undermine "the

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8   To be sure, Ober provides much more convincing evidence for this theory than Popper does. See e.g. his analysis of the suffixes *-arche* and *-kratos* in Ober, 2008.

9   Here I am deliberately going against the quite Marxian interpretation of Machiavelli presented by J. P. McCormick (2001), which I consider to be refuted esp. by Machiavelli 2003, book I, chap. 37.

most important potential means of bettering the lot of the economically weak" and pose "the greatest potential danger to human freedom" (Popper 2012, 245 and Popper 2013, 369 and 335).

Marxists' ado about "the possibility of buying votes" is a product of their misguided view that economic power is fundamental. In fact, says Popper, once we have achieved what Marxists call "mere formal freedom", that is, democracy, "we can control vote-buying in every form. There are laws to limit the expenditure on electioneering, and it rests entirely with us to see that much more stringent laws of this kind are introduced" (Popper 2013, 337). In general,

> 'mere formal freedom', i.e. democracy, the right of the people to judge and to dismiss their government, is the only known device by which we can try to protect ourselves against the misuse of political power; it is the control of the rulers by the ruled. And since political power can control economic power, political democracy is also the only means for the control of economic power by the ruled. Without democratic control, there can be no earthly reason why any government should not use its political and economic power for purposes very different from the protection of the freedom of its citizens. (*Ibid.*, 335)

Furthermore, Popper stresses that democratic control would be desirable *even if men were angels*, because without it the weak would live at the mercy of the strong. This is most clearly expressed in the passage from the 1954 Mont-Pèlerin paper quoted in the first section. But already in *The Open Society*, Popper cites to a similar effect Mill's *Subjection of Women* and the "excellent passage of his *Representative Government* (1861; see especially p. 49) where Mill combats the Platonic ideal of the philosopher king because, *especially if his rule should be a benevolent one*, it will involve the 'abdication' of the ordinary citizen's will, and ability, to judge a policy" (Popper 2013, 580). *The Subjection of Women* is also mentioned by Pettit as a late example of republican thinking in the already-liberal era (Pettit 1997, 139; see also Pettit 2014, 22).

But Popper, even in *The Open Society*, does not stop at quoting. For his own part, he writes that

> the acceptance of even a bad policy in a democracy (as long as we can work for a peaceful change) is preferable to the submission to a tyranny, however wise or benevolent. Seen in this light, the theory of democracy is not based upon the principle that the majority should rule; rather, the various equalitarian methods of democratic control, such as general elections and representative government, are to be considered as no more than well-tried and, in the presence of a widespread traditional distrust of tyranny, reasonably effective institutional safeguards against tyranny, always open to improvement, and even providing methods for their own improvement. (Popper 2013, 119)

I would argue that Philip Pettit's model of democracy is basically the

same. In *Just Freedom*, he writes that democracy equals people "enjoying freedom as non-domination in their relationships with their state", and that such a non-domination "requires more than making the state's decisions with a simple majority, since a majority-based system might marginalise some individuals and effectively deny them a share in control". What it demands is "control by the citizenry", which, apart from elections, consists of a system of separation of powers and of various institutions such as a public broadcaster, an ombudsman, or a bureau of statistics, which are made effectively independent of the government. (Pettit 2014, xxv, 98, 111–4, 124–7, 147)

In *Political Philosophy in Public Life*, Pettit even explicitly writes that

> The fact that those in government are controlled effectively and equally by the people does not entail that they are elected; nor does the fact that they are elected mean that they are popularly controlled. That certain officials are appointed by elected authorities, for example, or even that they inherit office, as in the case of the constitutional monarch, does not mean that they are uncontrolled; they may be subject to checks and balances that put them under an effective popular discipline and may count as authorised representatives of the people [...]. And, on the other side, the fact that certain authorities are elected does not guarantee that they are subject to popular control. Let someone not care about being reelected, and

the fact that they came to office via election may have no controlling effect on their actions. This has always been recognised in mainstream republicanism, as when James Madison (1987) [...] warned against the problem of an "elective despotism". (In Martí and Pettit 2010, 60)

Perhaps the most "Popperian" of Pettit's texts, though, is his article on Brexit in the *New Statesman*, in which he further develops a distinction between *populist* and *republican* notions of democracy (Pettit 1997, 201), now calling them *the populist model* and *the personalist model*. While the former understands elections as the be-all and end-all of democracy, the latter sees them as an (essential) part of the devices necessary to provide for freedom (as *nondomination*).

> Where the populist model takes democracy to operate via the single channel of election to office, the personalist alternative emphasises the importance of three channels. First, the electoral channel, which is needed guard against dynastic control. Second, the checks-and-balances channel which forces those elected to power to operate within a network of unelected authorities who operate under constitutional constraints. And third, the contestatory channel that enables ordinary citizens and civic bodies to hold up those in power, elected and unelected, to public scrutiny. For personalists, the significance of the second and third channels

is underlined by the way they are systematically attacked in autocratic democracies. (Pettit 2019)

Obviously, this already makes the *personalist model* very much akin to Popper's *protectionism*. But the resemblance is even more obvious when Pettit proceeds to the practical aim of his article, saying that although the 'personalist model' allows, in principle, for referenda, it demands measures to be taken so that the result would not "reduce the protection currently available to certain vulnerable sectors" or "jeopardise the lives of citizens who planned around the status quo" (*Ibid.*).

There are at least four other features of his thinking about democracy that Popper shares with Pettit and/or with the older republican tradition (rather than with the liberals):

1) Democracy is a necessary condition for all rights. As mentioned before, nothing like *natural rights* exists, according to Popper. Since they are only granted by institutions, and since democracy is the only institution able to protect people from arbitrary power, it follows that there can be nothing worthy of the name *rights* without democracy. In *The Open Society*, Popper writes:

If democracy is destroyed, all rights are destroyed. Even if certain economic advantages enjoyed by the ruled should persist, they would persist only on sufferance. (Popper 2013, 369)

and in the 1988 article in *The Economist*:

… a dictator, even if he were benevolent, would rob all others of their responsibility, and thus of their human rights and duties. This is a sufficient basis for deciding in favour of democracy – that is, a rule of law that enables us to get rid of the government. (in Popper 2012, 365)

2) Democracy is also the best environment for reasonable reforms. Since this is the main topic of Lis and Donohue (2018) and, to some extent, of Jarvie (2001), I will limit myself to a very short review of the textual evidence. It is widely known that Popper defined democracy as a regime in which "government can be got rid of without bloodshed".[10] (It is also one of the few of Popper's ideals which still circulate nowadays with an acknowledgment of his authorship – see e.g. Przeworski 1999.) This, however, also means that democracy "provides the institutional framework for the reform of political institutions. It makes possible the reform of institutions without using violence" (Popper 2013, 120). Non-democracies, on the other hand, are rather ill-equipped for reforms which are reasonable and meaningful:

One of the difficulties faced by a benevolent dictator is to find whether the effects of his measures agree with his good intentions (as de Tocqueville

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10   Popper 2002, 463–4 and 472; Popper 2012, 243 and 334; Popper 2013, 118. This definition was, of course, crucial for Popper's main aim in writing *The Open Society*: "the defence of democracy against fascism". (Hacohen 2016, 30; Kochan 2009, 288; Stelzer 2006, 237; Weinstein and Zakai 2006).

saw clearly more than a hundred years ago). The difficulty arises out of the fact that authoritarianism must discourage criticism; accordingly, the benevolent dictator will not easily hear of complaints concerning the measures he has taken. (Popper 2013, 149–50)

As Stokes (2006, 227) points out, democracy is also crucial for Popper's so-called *negative utilitarianism*. Without it, it is hard to imagine how the most pressing grievances would be identified, and – even more importantly – what the adequate means to alleviate them are. Furthermore, such an identification is a *permanent* process, not something which can be dealt with once and for all by some revolution-imposed benefactor with dictatorial power: "we must expect every elimination of an evil to create, as its unwanted repercussion, a host of new though possibly very much lesser evils" (Popper 2013, 697). Because of this, Popper believed (unlike most liberals) that a "consistent democratic constitution should exclude only one type of change in the legal system, namely a change which would endanger its democratic character" (*Ibid.*, 368). (As gestured towards above, liberals also typically *do not* see democracy as something essential for liberty – they see it at best as something that "on the whole, provides a better guarantee of the preservation of civil liberties than other regimes" – Berlin 2002, 177).

3) Resolute rejection of technocracy/epistocracy. If there is any truth in the myths of *vox populi vox dei* and "the man in the street", says Popper, it is that "many simple men are often wiser than their governments; and if not wiser, then inspired by better or more generous intentions" (Popper 2002, 468). There is thus a great need for public "watchfulness, enforced by institutions to help us watch – i.e. by *democratic institutions* which are devised (using Platonic language) to enable the herd to watch, and to judge, their watchdogs" (Popper 2013, 636). Later in his life (1963), Popper even expressed this crucial republican thought in almost republican language:

> The member of a free society and citizen of a free state has certainly a duty of loyalty to the state, because the existence of the state is essential for the continuance of the society, and he will serve the state when the need arises. And yet, it is also his duty to combine with this loyalty a certain degree of vigilance, and even a certain degree of distrust of the state and its officers: it is his duty to watch and see that the state does not overstep the limits of its legitimate functions. For the institutions of the state are powerful, and where there is power there is always the danger of its misuse – and a danger to freedom. (in Popper 2012, 241)

It should also be mentioned that Popper was contemplating the title *A Social Philosophy for the Citizen* for what was later published as *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Popper's letter to Carnap from 31 March 1943, now in Popper 2012, 90).

4) A violent revolution is legitimate if and only if it is against non-democracy with

an aim to bring about democracy. This is the only one of Popper's democracy-connected claims which Pettit does not explicitly address.[11] One finds, though, ample support for violent revolution among the republicans of old (indeed, it was the very *raison d'être* for many of their writings). This did not escape Popper. In *The Open Society*, he writes: "I believe with some medieval and Renaissance Christian thinkers who taught the admissibility of tyrannicide that there may indeed, under a tyranny, be no other possibility, and that a violent revolution may be justified." In the very next sentence, though, he brilliantly expresses a way in which he differs from these thinkers (who often pursued various positive – usually religious – goals):

> But I also believe that any such revolution should have as its *only* aim the establishment of a democracy; and by a democracy I do not mean something as vague as 'the rule of the people' or 'the rule of the majority', but a set of institutions (among them especially general elections, i.e. the right of the people to dismiss their government) which permit public control of the rulers and their dismissal by the ruled, and which make it possible for the ruled to obtain reforms without

using violence, even against the will of the rulers. (Popper 2013, 360)

To be sure, one reason for this is moral (violence should be limited to necessary cases). But there is also a pragmatic reason: "A violent revolution which tries to attempt more than the destruction of tyranny is at least as likely to bring about another tyranny as it is likely to achieve its real aims." (*Ibid.*) Nonetheless, this certainly does not prevent Popper from being unusually fiery about the topic (after all, one has to realise that he watched helplessly as fascists took over power in his native Austria, only to forfeit it to Hitler four years after): A "government which attempts to misuse its powers and to establish itself as a tyranny (or which tolerates the establishment of a tyranny by anybody else) outlaws itself, and [...] the citizens have not only a right but also a duty to consider the action of such a government as a crime, and its members as a dangerous gang of criminals." (*Ibid.*)

To conclude with a slogan of my own, I believe that Popper's realistic political ideal would best be called *the republic of intertwined answerability.*[12]

This has a big overlap with Pettit's idea of *contestability* – an idea originating with Machiavelli, for whom an empowered citizenry was "a necessary means for keeping the mixed constitution in place" (Pettit 2014, 8). Nowadays,

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11 The reason seems obvious to me: Unlike Popper, Pettit writes (or rather *used to write*) primarily for an audience which neither lives under a non-democratic regime nor is very likely to live under one in the nearest future. In such circumstances, every mention of violent revolution might turn counter-productive: it might be used by people trying to violently overthrow regimes which can, in fact, be changed non-violently.

12 With the same caveat that Pettit (esp. Martí and Pettit 2010, 31, 40–1) makes: that *republic* does not stand for *non-monarchy* as long as the monarchy in question is constitutional and democratically checked upon.

it is the idea of the *demos* exercising *kratos* "not in causing this or that to be decided on, or to be decided on by this or that process, but in ensuring that a myriad of other policies and processes are never considered" (*Ibid.*, 139).

Although in *The Open Society* Popper (2013, 368) usually limits himself to the example of general elections as the "most important" of the democratic institutions, in the 1954 Mont-Pèlerin paper he also describes what Stokes (2006, 220) has aptly called the "additional stimulus of organised public opinion" (cf. Popper 2002, Chap. 17). This is very similar to what is described by Pettit (2014, 140) when he refers to the role of public opinion in amelioration of "the employment of children, the treatment of women, [...] the conduct of affairs in mines and mills and factories". In this sense, I agree with Shearmur (2001, 37) that "what Popper called piecemeal social engineering [is] essentially, governmental initiatives controlled by critical feedback from citizens".

For both Pettit and Popper, democracy and, indeed, the state itself are primarily the means to *safeguard freedom* "widely interpreted".

━━ 3. CONCLUSION

Popper agrees with Marx in his "republican" outlook that only one who does not live at the mercy of another is free. Unlike Marx and like republicans, he seeks a political remedy for unfreedom. He further rejects the ethical naturalism often subscribed to by left liberals, as well as their positive-goals orientation and their tolerance for benevolent dictators. (Philip Pettit makes the same rejections.) Like republicans, Popper makes freedom "an anti-power", dependent on democracy, and a gateway value for other values. He does not abandon the liberal concept of freedom as *noninterference* altogether, nor does he replace it definitely with freedom as *nondomination*. But he gets fairly close to the latter when he writes that "there is no freedom if it is not secured by the state; and conversely, only a state which is controlled by free citizens can offer them any reasonable security at all".

Consequently, the protection of freedom requires, according to Popper, a rather robust state. Its responsibilities include the protection of children from neglect, free higher education, the provision of universal social and health insurance, and so on. Popper, like Pettit, rejects the idea that these would somehow be essential or quasi-eschatological functions of the state. At the end of the day, they are political demands – expressions of what we, the citizens, want from the state. Both Pettit and Popper hope to persuade most people that the possibility of living at the mercy of the economically strong is as undesirable as the possibility of living at the mercy of those with "the larger fists or the bigger guns". Both believe that it is, in general, more desirable as well as less utopian to limit public policies to the removal of the causes of grievances, while positive goals should be left for private initiatives (preferably of friends and family).

Popper's views regarding the rule of law and his arguments against "discretionary powers" are virtually

indistinguishable from those of the republican authors.

He conceptualises democracy not as the rule of the majority but as "various egalitarian methods of democratic control" of the government. Unless controlled, *any* government can be tyrannical, says Popper echoing one of the main republican themes. And even more importantly, unless those who govern are controlled by the governed, the latter cannot "claim and enforce" *as their rights* any benefits they may enjoy by living in the state. It is therefore crucial "to replace the question: *Who should rule?* by the new question: *How can we so organize political institutions that bad or incompetent rulers can be prevented from doing too much damage?*"

For Popper, as for the republicans, "the *theory of (unchecked) sovereignty*" is *the* most virulent of all political concepts. It is highly interesting that among the proponents of this theory, Popper names not only Plato, Hegel, and Marx, but also Bodin and Rousseau – the two archenemies of Italo-Atlantic republicans.

Pre-dating Josiah Ober, Popper presents a theory that *democracy* in ancient Athens did not mean that the people had a monopoly on the government, but that they were *enabled* to participate in it. Together with the stress on contestation (praising institutions such as the ombudsman, and so on), this brings him very close to Pettit's concept of rule *on the people's terms*. Popper also comes near to Machiavelli's democratic realism in viewing ordinary citizens as the primary check and balance on those in power.

Democracy is the most important

institution for the preservation of freedom, also because only public discussion about the limitations of freedom can create a "readiness" to fight for its defence (while it can still be defended).

Though predictable institutions are highly preferable to reliance on the arbitrary power of persons, this does not mean that democracy can be conceived of as a purely impersonal system: "Institutions are like fortresses. They must be well designed *and* manned." As with Pettit, one of the most important practical issues in politics is the issue of how to achieve a condition where institutions are manned with people who intend to use them for their proper purposes and, at the same time, to safeguard against the misuse of power.

For all the things Popper has to say about democracy, for him it is only a means to protect freedom, not an end in itself. Though a lot is demanded from a citizen in Popper's *open society*, at the end of the day, the state is there for her, not she for the state. In this regard, Popper stands in agreement with republicans such as Pettit and Skinner, but in disagreement with those such as Sandel or Taylor. Popper also shares with Pettit (or earlier republicans) the views that: 1) democracy is a necessary condition for all rights; 2) it is the best environment for reasonable reforms; 3) technocracy/epistocracy is unconditionally bad; 4) a violent revolution is legitimate if and only if it is against non-democracy and with the aim of bringing about democracy. The first three of these views are in direct opposition to canonical liberal beliefs and the fourth shows important differences from them.

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