

The Good, the Bad, and the Pedophile

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INTRODUCTION

The virtue approach can be presented as an all-inclusive view on moral education, or at least as a view that is less one-sided than rival approaches to moral education. The educational ideal of the virtue approach is the virtuous person. And pursuing this ideal requires that our educational attention be multidirectional — that is, not one-sidedly concentrated on cognitive, conative, affective, or behavioral aspects of the child's development, but evenly focussed on all these components in their interconnectedness.

The fact that virtuousness is an ideal of wide comprehension is, in our view, a convincing reason for taking it as a guiding principle for the practice of moral education. However, endorsing virtuousness as an educational ideal is one thing, explaining its nature is quite a different matter — and definitely also a very complex one, given the persistent philosophical debates on how exactly the virtuous person should be conceived.

One of the issues of long-standing controversy is the affective life of the virtuous person. With regard to this component of virtuousness, a rough distinction can be made between two opposite views. A first account, which may be called the *Aristotelian* view, claims that (i) virtuousness is expressed in emotions that are in harmony with the judgments of practical reason, and (ii) this psychic harmony is attainable by cultivating our emotions, which seems to imply that we can be held responsible not only for expressing or suppressing our emotions, but also for our affective life as such.¹ These claims, which we shall call the harmony thesis and the responsibility thesis henceforth, are more or less explicitly repudiated by a second view on the emotions of the virtuous person. This account, which could be named the *Kantian* view, claims that (i) virtuousness is best regarded as fortitude or strength of will in relation to the emotional forces opposing moral attitude or duty, and (ii) such conflicts are persistent and inevitable, despite our sustained endeavors of bringing our affective life in line with practical reason, which should make us rather pessimistic concerning the possibility of holding people responsible for their emotions.

The reason for calling these opposite views Aristotelian and Kantian is that they clearly have their roots in, and are often associated with, the writings of Aristotle and Kant respectively. However, we deliberately did not call them *Aristotle's* view and *Kant's* view, because their work also includes passages that are difficult to reconcile with the indicated claims, or which at least seem to force us to introduce some refinements. For example, Aristotle regards moderating and transforming the emotions as largely a matter of habituation in early childhood, which may cast doubt on the possibility of holding adults fully responsible for their emotional life. And in his *Tugendlehre* (1797) Kant seems to be less pessimistic regarding our efforts of

mitigating the conflicts between reason and passion than in his earlier *Grundlegung* (1786). On the basis of such considerations, one may even wonder whether the adjectives “Aristotelian” and “Kantian” are appropriate. We think they are, but even if they should be considered inappropriate, this will not in any sense make our central questions regarding the affective life of the virtuous person less important or basic: (i) Is virtuousness shown in expressing emotions that are harmonized with practical reason, or rather in controlling emotions that are in conflict with practical judgment? and (ii) Are we capable of cultivating our emotions and therefore responsible for them, or is praise or blame for having certain emotions inappropriate because they are resistant to cultivation?

From the outset it should be clear that we do not have any pretension of tackling the many complicated problems that lurk behind these questions. Our aim is a rather modest one, though we do claim immodestly that our approach may be original and fruitful. We shall start with a brief analysis of an important part of our personal identity, which is usually called *sexual identity*. We shall distinguish different components of our sexual identity, as well as locate possible tensions or conflicts between these components, in particular between our normative beliefs about sexuality and our actual sexual urges, feelings, and fantasies. Then we shall discuss, in particular by introducing the example of a pedophile, whether the indicated tensions or conflicts sustain or rather undermine the Aristotelian or Kantian account of virtuousness.

SEXUAL IDENTITY

What exactly makes an individual the same over time? And how do we know that someone is the same person as the one we met many years ago? In discussions about such metaphysical and epistemological questions, a rather thin concept of personal identity is presupposed. However, when we speak about the identity of a person in this paper, we are not referring to sameness over time but to the sort of person someone is. This more substantial concept of personal identity is presupposed when we are trying to figure out what kind of character someone has, or when we describe the traits that we see as characteristic of ourselves. According to this substantial concept, a person’s identity is constituted by a configuration of central traits or qualities.²

An important part of a person’s identity is his or her *sexual identity*. Just like personal identity, sexual identity should be conceived as a structure of central traits or qualities. The question is, however, which *type* of traits we have in mind when speaking about sexual identity. What exactly are the criteria on the basis of which certain traits can be regarded as being part of someone’s sexual identity? Though we could draw the line more narrowly, in a sense to be explained later on, we favor a rather broad criterion, according to which sexual identity is composed of those qualities that relate to sexual activities; that means, roughly, to conduct that is capable of producing sensual pleasure or erotic gratification. Beliefs, desires, habits, behavioral patterns, dispositional feelings — they all can be elements of someone’s sexual identity but only if they are about, or directed at, or tending toward, or typical of, or incited by (the thought of) sexual activities.

Different aspects or components of our sexual identity can be distinguished. A first component that we want to discuss may be called the *central* part of our sexual identity. This component is made up of our sexual cravings and appetites, our sexual likes and dislikes, or the things we experience as sexually exciting or repulsive. In psychological research on human sexuality, this whole complex of affective qualities is described in terms of *erotic fantasy structures* (the patterns of mental images of sexual activities that characteristically arouse us sexually) and *arousal cue-response patterns* (the sensory cues that evoke or inhibit our erotic arousal).³

Expressions like “heterosexual,” “homosexual,” “pedophile,” “exhibitionist,” or “fetishist” are normally used to give a *general* characterization of the central part of someone’s sexual identity. They designate configurations of affective qualities that are supposed to be indicative of some (relatively) basic sexual preference for a certain type of sexual conduct. A homosexual, for example, has a basic preference for sexual interactions with one or more persons of the same sex. It’s true that the erotic fantasy structures and arousal cue-response patterns of homosexuals are widely divergent. Nonetheless these structures and patterns can be grouped together because they all can be regarded as indicative of the same basic sexual preference. From now on we shall call a person’s (relatively) basic preference(s) his or her *sexual orientation*. So explaining what sort of person someone is by describing his or her sexual orientation, consists in giving a general characterization of the central part of the person’s sexual identity by indicating one or more basic sexual preferences.

As already stated, the concept of sexual identity can be more or less narrowly construed. One might argue that describing sexual identity is tantamount to indicating the configuration of characteristic erotic fantasy structures and arousal cue-response patterns (perhaps completed by pointing out typical sexual behavioral patterns). We prefer, however, a more encompassing concept of sexual identity. To be sure, by calling such fantasy structures and cue-response patterns the *central* part of someone’s sexual identity, we want to make clear that descriptions of sexual identity cannot be adequate without these qualities being highlighted. But we think it is quite common that in descriptions of sexual identity other components are also mentioned.

In philosophical and psychological taxonomies of personal identity, not only are a person’s actual traits seen as aspects of personal identity, but also a person’s conception of his or her *ideal* self. With reference to such taxonomies, we could argue that next to actual fantasy structures and cue-response patterns, normative beliefs regarding sexuality are also part of someone’s sexual identity. This second component is best called the *normative* part of someone’s sexual identity. It is made up of the person’s values, standards, and principles with regard to sexual activities and their accompanying sexual feelings and inclinations which we called the central part of sexual identity. Such normative beliefs do not only apply to the central part of one’s own sexual identity and its behavioral expressions, but also to those of others. Often someone’s dominant or overriding normative beliefs regarding sexuality will be moral or (perhaps more broadly) ethical beliefs, but they also can be prudential or aesthetic ones.

The central part of our sexual identity may be fully in line with the normative part. In such cases we think there is nothing wrong with our erotic fantasy structures and our arousal cue-response patterns, nor with the sexual activities that are expressive thereof. We (implicitly) approve of the central part of our sexual identity, including our basic preferences. However, there can be all kinds of gaps or tensions between these components of sexual identity, for example, if one's actual sexual feelings and inclinations are rather moderate and one is committed to the aesthetic ideal of the passionate lover or the ethical ideal of the real macho (which explains why so many rhinos are killed). Or, to take another example, if a man morally despises some of his erotic affections because he believes in the words of Jesus that any man who lusts after another woman has already committed adultery with her.

Our normative views on sexuality can be conceived as a way of *relating* to the central part of our sexual identity. Next to the normative part, there are two other components of sexual identity that are ways of relating to the central part as well. The first one is what we standardly think the central part of our sexual identity actually is (which may be called the *interpretative* part of one's sexual identity), while the second component consists in the ways we present ourselves to others with the intention of getting them to believe that the central part of our sexual identity is composed of certain qualities (which could be designated as the *public* part of one's sexual identity). Just like the normative component, these components may conflict with the central part of one's sexual identity, as for example, when a person believes himself to be a heterosexual whereas in fact (possibly "deep down inside") his basic preferences are homosexual, or when a person shows her actual sexual preferences in the private sphere while publicly suggesting quite another sexual orientation.

To sum up, then, we can regard our sexual identity as made up of different components — namely, the central part with its basic preferences, and the various ways of relating to that particular component, which we called respectively the normative, the interpretative, and the public part. To prevent misunderstandings, we want to end our brief analysis by distinguishing sexual identity from so-called *gender* identity. In relevant publications the term "gender identity" is used in two different ways. First, "gender identity" is often rather formally defined as the subjective sense of oneself as male or female. Usually one's gender identity, in this sense, is consistent with one's biological sex, but in relatively rare cases, especially in cases of transsexualism, gender identity is at odds with biological sex. It will be clear that this concept of gender identity is quite different from our concept of sexual identity, though, from a psychological point of view, there will be all kinds of correlations between seeing oneself as male or female and the development of a certain sexual identity. Second, "gender identity" is also much more substantially defined as the degree of conformity to, acceptance of, or identification with, one's gender role. All societies have normative conceptions of masculinity or femininity, that is, of the qualities that are considered appropriate for a male or female. And "gender identity," in this second sense, refers to the extent in which these qualities have become part of someone's personal identity. Because conceptions of masculinity and femininity also apply to the sexual sphere, one's sexual identity can be

more or less masculine or feminine. However, “gender identity” covers many other spheres of life as well. Therefore it can better be conceived as a concept that applies to our personal identity as a whole.

IMPLICATIONS

Tensions and conflicts between the central and normative part of sexual identity are quite common, and they can be rather vehement. In an interview the Dutch sexologist Louis Gooren reports that some of his patients asked for treatment because their sexual orientation strongly incites them to do things that are contrary to the law.⁴ Such persons evaluate the central component of their sexual identity negatively, maybe for prudential reasons, more probably for moral reasons. And our question is: has the fact that such tensions or conflicts occur any implications for the tenability of the conceptions of virtuousness which were described in the introductory section?

Let us begin with the harmony thesis. According to the Aristotelian view, the affective life of the virtuous person listens to reason. Not only the person’s choice on the basis of deliberation but also his or her emotions and the implicated inclinations are “in the mean.” As opposed to this view, the Kantian account claims that virtuousness is shown in successful moral struggle against contrary inclinations. Overcoming inappropriate passions after fierce struggle bears testimony to the agent’s virtuousness.

Conflicts between the central and the normative component of sexual identity, in particular between sexual affections and *moral* beliefs, seem to give some support to the Aristotelian view. Take, for example, a homosexual pedophile who suffers from this type of conflict. The fantasies and sensory cues that sexually arouse him clearly indicate a basic preference for having sex with prepubescent boys. On the basis of his moral beliefs, however, he strongly condemns his sexual orientation. He regards his sexual feelings, cravings, thoughts, and fantasies as reprehensible, base, or something to be deeply ashamed of — in short, as something that is *vicious*, or at least *not virtuous*. And would it not be intuitively strange if this man, in spite of his deep moral loathing for pedophile sexual preferences, would consider himself to be a virtuous person?

On the other hand, if we complete the description of our homosexual pedophile in a certain way, the example also seems to give some support for the Kantian view. Suppose that the man persistently tries to control his sexual urges and fantasies and succeeds in doing so. Would not that be a sign of his virtuousness? His sexual cravings and feelings are clearly not in harmony with his practical judgments. Nevertheless, it would be counterintuitive to deny that the person shows virtuousness in his achievement of control over his inclinations and success in refraining from having sex with prepubescent boys.

So our intuitions regarding the homosexual pedophile seem to point in opposite directions, thereby confirming both the Aristotelian and the Kantian account of the virtuous person. We think, however, that we can tackle this problem by acknowledging that virtuousness is not an absolute quality but a matter of *degree*, ranging from immature to full-grown virtuousness, from virtuousness that is deficient to

virtuousness that is perfect, from limited to complete virtuousness. Given this obvious fact, we can argue that our pedophile exhibits a certain kind of virtuousness in controlling his sexual inclinations. In particular he exhibits well-developed and morally infused virtues of willpower, like self-control and some form of persistency. Nevertheless, there is something wrong with him. Because the inclinations which he must try to control are morally reprehensible, his overall virtuousness is far from perfect. Indeed, if he succeeded in changing his sexual orientation and ceased to be troubled by pedophile urges and fantasies, he would certainly consider himself *more* virtuous than he now actually is. Then his virtuousness would be more complete — he would not just have virtuous normative beliefs and some virtues of will-power, but also virtuous sexual preferences or at least no vicious ones.

In other words, the thesis that virtuousness implies harmony is not confirmed by our example of the homosexual pedophile: the person shows virtuousness in his persistent control of the central part of his sexual identity. But if we restrict the scope of the harmony thesis, and see it as only applicable to *full* or *complete* virtuousness, it definitely gets some support from the example of the pedophile: harmonizing his sexual orientation with his normative beliefs is a way of perfecting his virtuousness.

Let us proceed and consider the responsibility thesis. According to the Aristotelian view, we can be held responsible for our emotions because they are dependent on choice. Of course, we cannot choose our affections directly, the way we choose our actions, but we can choose them indirectly, by moderating or cultivating our inner life. The Kantian view, however, is skeptical about the possibility of fashioning our emotions according to reason. We can, of course, choose to mold or change our emotions, but our efforts, even if sustained, will often not be very successful, as a consequence of which holding people responsible for their affective life would be inappropriate.

What, if any, are the implications of conflicts between the central and normative part of our sexual identity for the responsibility thesis? Does the fact that such tensions occur support the Aristotelian or the Kantian view? In trying to find an answer to these questions, our starting-point will be again the example of the homosexual pedophile. Can he be held responsible and therefore be *blamed* for his erotic fantasy structures and arousal cue-response patterns?

To start with, we could argue that the answer to this question must be in the negative because it is quite implausible that our pedophile has *chosen* his sexual orientation. It is often reported that people have the subjective feeling that they had no influence whatsoever on their own basic sexual preferences. What kind of sexual orientation we have is not chosen but discovered, not the result of our active intervention but something that simply happens to us. And why would that be different in case of a homosexual pedophile orientation?

However, this argument, even if based on true premises, does not do the work it is supposed to do. The fact that one has not chosen but is simply stuck with one's sexual orientation is only a necessary but certainly not a sufficient condition for not being responsible for one's basic sexual preferences. For even if one cannot be blamed for being confronted with certain sexual feelings and inclinations at a certain

time or age, one still may be blamed for not subsequently molding them in a desirable direction. Though we might accept the fact that the pedophile did not choose his basic preferences, we can still hold him responsible for having them if we assume that he could have changed them by taking the appropriate measures. So the next question is: Are we capable of changing our sexual orientation? Could our pedophile get rid of his troublesome sexual feelings by some kind of intervention?

To answer these questions, we cannot rely on our intuitions anymore but must take note of the results of empirical research. In particular, research on the potential effectiveness of various psychotherapies is relevant to our question. For if experts are not able to transform the sexual orientation of their clients, how could we expect them to be capable of remolding the central part of their sexual identity themselves? Moreover, if certain therapies have proven their worth, this would in itself be sufficient for holding our pedophile responsible for his sexual preferences. For if effective therapy is available and he would have chosen to undergo such treatment, he would in all probability not be a homosexual pedophile anymore.

Research on treatments of homosexuality and so-called paraphilias, including paedophilia, shows that in fact only forms of cognitive-behavior therapy are reasonably effective.⁵ The problem, however, is that the efficacy of such treatments is determined on the basis of behavioral criteria, in particular on recidivism rates. And changing sexual behavior is one thing, transforming erotic fantasy structures and arousal cue-response patterns is quite another thing. So the question is whether cognitive-behavior therapy is not only successful in changing sexual behavior but also in reforming basic sexual preferences.

A closer look at research results reveals that behaviorial therapists can hardly claim any success in achieving persistent changes of sexual orientation. What cognitive-behavioral programs accomplish are basically two things. First, they often succeed in changing belief systems which excuse or justify inappropriate or deviant sexual behavior. By what is called "cognitive restructuring" the client's rationalizations are challenged with the intention of establishing more adequate beliefs.⁶ Formulated in our terminology, such processes can be described as attempts to stimulate the development of a normative part of sexual identity that opposes the central part. But changing the cognitive superstructure obviously does not guarantee at all that the affective substructure is also changed. Because our pedophile, as described above, already rejects his sexual preferences on the basis of his normative beliefs, he will not benefit from cognitive restructuring. What he needs is a therapy that reforms the central part of his sexual identity itself.

Second, cognitive-behavioral techniques often also succeed in boosting the client's capacity of self-control. By teaching the client all kinds of behavioral skills and cognitive intervention strategies, he will be better able to anticipate and cope with potential relapses. It will be clear that this type of therapy, if successful, will improve the client's capacity to keep his sexual feelings under control. But again, this is quite different from modifying those feelings themselves. If our pedophile underwent such a therapy, his already well-developed virtues of will power may grow even further. But because the central part of his sexual identity is not affected, he still will remain a pedophile.

What else could our conclusion be but pessimistic? Though research on treatment of paraphiliacs shows some success with regard to behavior, it does not give us much hope that basic sexual preferences can be reformed. However, there still is one promising possibility for our pedophile: *pharmacological* treatment.⁷ Empirical research shows that hormonal as well as certain forms of nonhormonal pharmacologic treatment of paraphiliacs have positive results. But again, success is defined in terms of reduction of inappropriate behaviors. And the question is: is pharmacological treatment also able to transform basic sexual preferences? The answer, we think, must be again in the negative. The effect of using pharmacological agents is that the *strength* of sexual inclinations is reduced — but not that the *direction* of those inclinations is changed. The point of hormonal treatment, says Gooren, is to turn down the gas a little bit, as a result of which the client will get greater control over his sexual urges. So even if we put aside all kinds of ethical qualms and reservations, holding the pedophile responsible for his sexual orientation because he could have chosen to undergo pharmacologic treatment would be unwarranted.

CONCLUSION

In our analysis of sexual identity we have made a distinction between the central and the normative component, between our basic sexual drives and our normative beliefs about them. We argued that occurrent conflicts between these two components of our sexual identity give some confirmation for the harmony thesis, but only if the thesis is regarded as a conception of full or perfect virtuousness. As long as our sexual likes and dislikes are not in harmony with our practical judgments, we will not consider ourselves fully virtuous. Moreover, occurrent conflicts between the central and normative part of sexual identity seem to disconfirm the responsibility thesis. Because our basic sexual preferences are resistant to transformation attempts, we can hardly be held responsible for having them. Even sophisticated psychological and pharmacological treatment is not successful in changing our sexual orientation.

A somewhat disquieting conclusion of our analysis is that virtuousness is at least partly a matter of *luck*. Whether or not our basic sexual preferences meet the standards of virtuousness cannot be attributed to our own agency. If they are virtuous, luck is on our side, but if they are not, like in case of our homosexual pedophile, it's simply a matter of having bad luck.

The title of our paper is “The good, the bad, and the pedophile.” The good, of course, is the virtuous person, whose emotional life was the focus of our analysis. The pedophile is one who, as we have seen, can be virtuous in some sense, though not in any full sense. But who is the bad? We think that a pedophile may or even should be blamed for not controlling his sexual urges under certain circumstances. And there are perhaps good reasons, as many people think, to consider a pedophile who indulges in sex with children as morally bad. But one consequence of our analysis is that blaming persons for *being* a pedophile, as many people do, may be just as bad.

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1. In this paper we are using the word "emotion" rather broadly, more or less in the way Aristotle uses the word *pathos*: "By feelings [*pathé*] I mean appetite, anger, fear, confidence, envy, joy, love, hate, longing, jealousy, pity, in general whatever implies pleasure or pain." *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terrence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1985), 1105b20.
 2. See Amélie O. Rorty and David Wong, "Aspects of Identity and Agency," in *Identity, Character, and Morality*, ed. Owen Flanagan and Amélie O. Rorty (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 19-36.
 3. See, for example, Frederick Suppe, "Curing Homosexuality," in *Philosophy and Sex*, ed. Robert Baker and Frederick Elliston (New York: Prometheus, 1984), 394-95.
 4. See *Ad Valvas* (university newspaper), 14 September 1995.
 5. For a well-documented review of the research, see Gene G. Abel, Candice Osborn, David Anthony, and Peter Gardos, "Current Treatments of Paraphiliacs," *Annual Review of Sex Research* 3 (1992): 255-90. See also Suppe, "Curing Homosexuality," 398-99.
 6. For an analysis of the rationalizations of pedophile behavior, see Ben Spiecker and Jan Steutel, "Paedophilia, Sexual Desire, and Perversity," *Journal of Moral Education* 26, no. 3 (1997): 332-35.
 7. See, for example, Abel et al., "Current Treatments of Paraphiliacs," 276-81.