

TEXTE GARY WATSON

A related but distinct complaint concerns moral motivation. Even if we grant that we can derive determinate appraisals of conduct from an objective description of what is characteristic of the species, why should we care about those appraisals? Why should we care about living distinctively human lives rather than living like pigs or gangsters? Why is it worthwhile for us to have those particular virtues at the cost of alternative lives they preclude? There are two sorts of skepticism here. (1) Can an objective theory really establish that being a gangster is incompatible with being a good human being? (2) If it can, can it establish an intelligible connection between those appraisals and what we have reasons to do as individuals?

To answer (2) by saying "Because we are human beings" is obscure. For we are (or can be) these other things as well. "Our humanity is inescapable," it might be replied, "whereas we can choose whether or not to be a Hell's Angel. »The force of this reply is unclear, however, for we *can* choose whether to live a *good* (that is, characteristic) human life.

However, the point might be that we are human beings *by nature* and not these other things, and our nature determines what descriptions are essential. A good gangster is a bad human being and for that reason fails to fare well. Defective or nonvirtuous human beings are worse off for that. They are not merely bad human beings but *they* are badly off as individuals, and if they acquired virtue, they would not only be better human beings but also be better off than they would have been otherwise. Whether we are flourishing depends on who (what) we are by nature. Since we are essentially human, the description "bad human being" dominates the description "good gangster" in appraisals of wellbeing.

Such evaluational essentialism does not sit well with modern notions. Just as God is dead, it will be said, so the concept of human nature has ceased to be normative. We can no more recover the necessary-world view of the ancients than we can revitalize the Judeo-Christian tradition. But an ethics of virtue need not take this essentialist line. It could say instead that we care about being good human beings because or insofar as we are good human beings. Insofar as we are not, we don't (at least in the virtuous way). If we don't, then we will not flourish as human beings, though we might do very well as thieves. There is no further question to be answered here about well-being.

These seem to me to be the main worries and issues that must be faced before we can determine the prospects for an ethics of virtue. There is much to be said about what an objective account of human nature is supposed to be, as well as about the supposed disanalogies with health and about issues of motivational internalism. In this section I have tried merely to indicate some of the more troublesome questions.

Gary Watson, « On the Primacy of Character », (1991), section 15