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Person and Value

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1. Introduction

I define a 'person' as a subject with values, an entity that may, with greater or lesser ability, accede to values and accept them intentionally (For more detailed treatment see Poli 2006a). Unfortunately, discussion on 'personhood' suffers from a serious lack of conceptualization. The necessary preliminary to any adequate theory of the person is clarification of its ontological structure and of the concepts that make up its content. I believe that it is heuristically useful for this purpose to draw a distinction among at least three different aspects of 'person', which for lack of a better terminology I shall call $person_1$, $person_2$ and $person_3$. These can be exemplified by referring to different thinkers who have authoritatively expounded their characteristics. I shall therefore associate Peter Singer with $person_1$, Nicolai Hartmann and Edith Stein with $person_2$ and John Finnis and Martha Nussbaum with $person_3$.

Given that these three aspects of person have essentially different ontological natures, it is reasonable to suppose that some of the traditional difficulties concerning the theory of the person depend on a failure to distinguish among them. Each of the three types of person has value, but each of the values differs from the others. $Person_1$ has the value corresponding to the dignity of a living being, while $person_2$ has the dignity corresponding to the acceptance or rejection of ethical values, and $person_3$ has the dignity corresponding to the qualities of an authentically human biography. $Person_1$ is structurally conditioned and pertains to the sphere of biological reality; $person_2$ is structurally conditioned and pertains to the sphere of spiritual reality; $person_3$ is structurally conditioned and pertains to the sphere of social reality. All of us are born a $person_1$; some of us *become* a $person_3$. Being a

$person_1$ is a matter of fact, it is intrinsic to our nature as living beings. The quality of being a $person_1$ is not acquired, but nor is it never lost. Being a $person_3$ is instead structurally fragile: one can become a $person_3$ and one can cease to be one. A $person_3$ can accede to a higher plane of reality, but then may be unable to remain at that level, and may even choose or be compelled to leave it.

Possessing the dignity of a living being or having a biography are two different aspects of the person as a subject with values. In this paper I shall focus on person as the entity that may accede to values (i.e., to $person_2$, leaving the analysis of $person_1$ and $person_3$ for another occasion (Poli 2006a, 2008a, b)).

2. Emotions and values

The connections between emotions and ethics have been widely investigated in recent decades. Two arguments in particular have been put forward: (1) emotions are important for correctly judging the ethical components of the situations in which we find ourselves and then act on the basis of those judgements; (2) the emotions are important because they activate the agent's will, while the thought alone of a duty is not sufficient to prompt action.

The interesting aspect of these – and similar – positions is that they view the emotions as essentially *instrumental* elements or components. In the former case, the emotions serve to make correct judgements; in the second they serve for action. In both cases, the emotions function as instruments for performance of something different.

If these positions were correct, it should be possible to judge morally sensitive situations correctly and act appropriately with no emotional perception (Stark 2004, 360). At bottom, if this were the case, the ancient Stoic idea of proceeding by annulling the emotions, or at least by reducing them to the minimum, may be correct.

The alternative is to recognize that the emotions – besides being good for something or other – also have intrinsic value. The idea is not a new one, because

there are explicit traces of it in Aristotle, but it is worth recalling here. For theorists of the virtues, the emotions are not important just because they are parts of a morally correct action; they are important because they have a value independent of the value of the action. It is evident that there are appropriate (correct) or inappropriate (incorrect) emotions even in situations where no action is taken – or more simply, which are so independently of action. Being distressed by the pain of others or rejoicing at their happiness – even when the situation is structured so that we can do nothing about it – are the two most obvious cases of emotions that are correct independently of any possible action. Conversely, rejoicing at the pain of others or feeling distressed at their happiness are obvious cases of incorrect emotions.

The development of virtues entails the development of appropriate emotional attitudes.[1] The series of cognitive acts defined by Brentano – presentations, judgements, and acts of love and hate – provide a good framework within which to defend the thesis that emotions have intrinsic value. Brentano's third class of intentional acts, that of acts of love and hate, has all the requisite characteristics. These acts are not directed or instrumental to either the judgement (on which, as we have seen, they depend and which in their turn influence) or action (which may or may not ensue, according to the circumstances).

The joint development of a satisfactory theory of emotions and a satisfactory theory of values should lead to recognition of the correspondence between emotions

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[1] Here I depart from Stark 2004. On p. 363 Stark refers to Anderson 1993 and repeats her confusion between concrete particulars ("persons, animals, communities and things") and states of affairs. Stark and Anderson maintain that concrete particulars "are objects of our values", "have intrinsic value" and are "the building blocks of value", while states of affairs have extrinsic value, a value which depends on that of the concrete particulars "contained in them". But concrete particulars, precisely because they are concrete, for reasons of categorial consistency cannot be parts of states of affairs. Moreover, it is imprecise to say that concrete particulars are objects of our values. If anything, they are objects of our acts of valuation.

and value responses. A situation cannot be simultaneously viewed as 'agreeable' and 'exciting'. If one response is correct, the other cannot be.[2]

3. From Brentano to Husserl

Brentano's distinction between acts of judgement and evaluative acts was taken up by Husserl, with his distinction between objectifying acts and non-objectifying acts. Objectifying acts are those which contribute to knowledge about objects, whilst non-objectifying acts do not contribute to knowledge about objects. As for Brentano evaluative acts presuppose acts of judgement, so for Husserl non-objectifying acts presuppose objectifying acts. For Brentano and Husserl, moreover, both cases involve intentional acts.

The problem that now arises is the apparent conflict between the thesis that evaluative acts (Brentano) or non-objectifying acts (Husserl) are intentional acts, i.e. acts which by definition are directed towards an object, and the thesis that non-objectifying acts do not contribute to knowledge about objects.

Husserl's solution is that non-objectifying acts are *founded* acts, or acts which must be grounded on other acts. If this is so, two different interpretations are possible: according to the first, the object of non-objectifying objects is the *object* of the underlying objectifying act; according to the second, the object of the non-objectifying act is the underlying objectifying *act* (and only secondarily, so to speak, its object).

Both interpretations have been defended (e.g. by Gigliotti 2004 and Benoist 2004). Whichever of them is correct, the objects of value are in any case *founded* objects, or as the Meinongian school puts it, they are *higher-order objects*.

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[2] Hartmann 2003, p. 57, with reference to Hildebrand 1916. More recently, Feinberg has sought to distinguish between what is deserved and the basis of desert, or the characteristic of the person by virtue of which s/he deserves something. It would indeed be very interesting to distinguish between the various bases of desert and what they make specifically deserved. As Hurka 1998. p. 315, points out, for every virtue only some goods are appropriate rewards.

Both Brentano and Husserl defend the intentionality of mental acts, defining it as directedness towards an object. But Husserl introduces an important distinction not present in Brentano: that between 'empty' intentional acts and 'filled' intentional acts. In the former case, the object is anticipated in the form of a typical schema and may be only implicitly present to the agent's awareness. In the latter case, the object is given 'in concrete'. The distinction is important because it allows us to maintain the thesis that all intentional acts have correlates even when we are not aware of such correlates or do not notice them.

To be pointed out is that the distinction among different types of act has extended and enriched the traditional distinction between theoretical reason and practical reason. These are no longer viewed as reified instances of distinct faculties but rather, as we have seen, as the articulations of different families of acts with specific forms of inner organization and dependency.

Thus far, I have presented the dependence of non-objectifying acts on objectifying acts according to the 'univocal' and linear format introduced by Brentano: higher-level acts depend on – in the sense of 'require' – lower-level acts. Husserl views the matter in more sophisticated terms. He replaces Brentano's unilateral dependence with a reciprocal multilateral dependence. Indeed, he talks of an *interweaving* among the various types of act, and therefore of their reciprocal co-determination. Husserl's idea is probably that of a twofold constitution phase in which the dependence of non-objectifying acts on objectifying acts is accompanied by feedback from non-objectifying acts to objectifying ones. The situation should therefore be viewed in dynamic terms. Hence, the two parts of the problem consist in the following two theses. On the one hand, "the evaluative act, essentially because it constitutes the phenomenon of value, is founded on the intellective act"; on the other, "the theoretical reason and the evaluative reason are everywhere intertwined" (Husserl 1988, p. 72).

4. Emotional acts

So far, so good. But we have only touched upon the problem of personhood. In order to frame the problem of the person and its nature more precisely, we must explore the level of emotional acts. In the architecture described thus far, emotional acts are complex acts founded on other types of act. We now need a more fine-gauge classification of emotional acts and their internal relations.

Phenomenologists have discovered that for every level of the constitution of living beings there are appropriate families of emotional acts which convey specific contents. The lowest level is the organic one of life. I call it the 'level of the living'. The emotional acts relative to this level are the bodily feelings that inform us about the state of our organism (the discomfort of being cold, the pleasure of being warm), The second level is the 'vital' one: I call it the 'level of moods'. This is the subject's mental level, and the information pertinent to it corresponds to situations of joy, happiness, boredom, sadness, excitement, depression, and so on. This still has nothing that to do with the person as the bearer of value, which enters the scene only at the third level of constitution, the 'spiritual' one. Here, two different sets of values are associated with the person: the values that constitute the person, and the values that the person decides to follow once s/he has been constituted. The first set is well exemplified by the value of 'strength of character': the person sees him/herself in the way in which s/he reacts to pain, for example. We define a person as strong or weak according to how s/he responds to life-situations. However, we have still not entered the realm of authentically ethical values. A strong person may be bad, and a weak person may be good. Besides the level of the constitution of the person, therefore, we must recognize the further level of the person's ethical values. In this regard, the most important decision is between good and evil, this being immediately followed by its articulations in terms of virtues and vices.[3]

Only now have we entered the realm of ethical values. Strictly speaking, the emotional acts described by Brentano concern only this third class of emotional acts.

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[3] The scheme presented follows Edith Stein's classification of egological acts. Hartmann uses a very similar classification.

However, only by following the intricate layering of acts can we gain an accurate idea of their complexity. In the next section I shall distinguish the values that constitute the person (strength of character, for instance) from the directly ethical values of the virtues.

5. The values that constitute the person

The person is articulated along a number of dimensions, each of which is a cline ranging from a positive extreme to a negative extreme, both obviously understood in the ethical sense.

The first dimension varies from activity to passivity. By 'activity' is meant stance-taking or commitment; by 'passivity', indifference, inertia or apathy. The second dimension ranges from the capacity to suffer to the incapacity to suffer. The positive valence assigned to the capacity to suffer is signalled by the patent negativity of the incapacity to suffer. The former consists of resistance against the adversities of life, the character's tempering through suffering; the latter consists of inner fragility.

The third dimension centres on the opposition between a person's strength or weakness. Strength and activity are not synonymous: also passivity may be strong. The stance-taking associated with activity may be strong or weak; and inertia may be strong in the sense of stubborn.

The fourth dimension is anticipation: a more or less broad vision of the future to which the person may accede. In this case, the opposition takes the common-sense form of the difference between a broad and narrow outlook on the future.

The fifth dimension is the ability to select goals and to find the means with which to achieve them. I call this ability 'purposefulness'. The sixth and final dimension, the one that sums up all the others, is freedom or free choice (Hartmann 2003, pp. 137-143. I have changed the order of the dimensions).

A person is therefore defined as active, capable of suffering, strong, anticipatory, purposive, and free. These six characteristics influence each other in various ways.

Each characteristic consists of a continuum ranging from an extreme of value to an extreme of disvalue. Each dimension also has points of breakdown where values change directly into disvalues (different from disvalues as complements). Consider the capacity to suffer. It is true that suffering tempers the character, so that the person is able to achieve higher thresholds of value. However, if the suffering exceeds the ability to withstand it, the person is destroyed and the suffering changes directly into disvalue.

Note that all the values discussed are values of act. The person is constituted in the acts that constitute her.

In ethical terms, the person thus constituted still tells us nothing, because s/he can choose to do both good and evil. The person only enters the realm of values, or correspondingly of disvalues, when s/he opts in favour of the good or the bad.

6. Architectonic values

Standing midway between person-constituting values and authentically moral values are architectonic values. The family of architectonic values comprises three values that can be better defined if the values space is conceived as a territory which extends before the internal organ that sees values. With respect to the multiplicity of values and disvalues that spread out before us, architectonic valuation (a) chooses one single value (or a few interconnected values) and seeks to take them to their maximum level; (b) chooses the greatest possible number of values and seeks to synthesise them into an organic set; (c) ignores disvalues. Other structurally coherent options are obviously possible. But militating in favour of the three that I have mentioned is the fact that they are options which moralists have long recognized, although they adopt a different reasoning to do so. If they are given their traditional names, they are more easily recognized. Value (1) is nobility, value (2) is fullness, and value (3) is purity. Although my description is cruder than the usual ones, it has the merit of bringing out the structural conditions.

Nobility is the value oriented to loftiness. Its opposite value – not to be confused with its opposite as disvalue – is the common or ordinary. Fullness instead aims at the fusion, coordination and synthesis of all values. Its opposite is the inability to see values: a blindness to values, but not yet wickedness. Purity does not see disvalues: it views everything positively as endowed with value (Hartmann 2003, 204 fgg).

7. Person-realizing values

I call moral values 'values of virtue'. This sharp distinction between values of good and values of virtue remedies a major error committed by ancient ethics: that of considering virtue to be a good, albeit a higher-level one.[4] Three families of virtues' values can be distinguished: ancient values, Christian values, and modern values. The first two families rotate around a central value: justice for ancient ethics, love of one's neighbour for Christian ethics. Perhaps it would not be too bold to claim that if modern ethics is to be authentic, it must organize itself around love for the 'distant one'.

With reference to ancient ethics, I would mention two significant aspects of Plato's virtues and the particular organization of Aristotle's virtues. Plato's four virtues – justice, wisdom, strength and control – well sum up the character of ancient ethics. Justice is defined as equality with those who are recognized and accepted as equal. Wisdom – the highest virtue – governs the entire array of values and actions. The wise recognize the value of what is endowed with value. Strength transforms the vision into reality: merely seeing values is not enough; also required is the moral strength to realize them. The final value, control, consists in a sense of proportion and scale.

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[4] Hartmann 2003, p. 155. Brentano's distinction between acts and their correlates (as objects of acts) provides the basis for the difference between ethical values (as modes of acts) and values of goods (values of the objects of acts). By construction, therefore, the values of goods are never ethical values. For details see Poli 2006a.

Aristotle defines virtues as the 'medians' between two negative extremes. Thus, courage is midway between recklessness and cowardice; generosity is midway between extravagance and avarice; temperance is midway between self-indulgence and insensitivity; and pride is midway between vanity and humility (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1106 a26-b28). If one does not interpret this middle way among virtues correctly, one is almost forced to regard virtue as some kind of 'golden mean'. As Hartmann writes: "This theory has always been subjected to the mockery of critics. It appears only too ridiculous that the seriousness of virtue should resolve itself into the triviality of a 'golden mean', that is, into a mediocrity" (Hartmann 2003, p. 254).

To understand Aristotle's theory correctly, it should be borne in mind that virtues may grow without losing their nature as values by doing so. In fact, "temperance, strength, justice, taken as features of value, do not have upper limits". The key is provided by Aristotle when he writes: "Thus, according to its substance or the definition stating its essence, virtue is a mean, but with respect to the highest good and to excellence, it is an extreme" (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1107 a 6-8). In one sense, therefore, virtue is a mean, in another it is an extreme. These two senses relate to two dimensions of the space of values: ontologically, values are means between two disvalues, axiologically they are points of elevation (Hartmann 2003, p. 256).

The second family of values of virtue centres on love for one's neighbour. While justice may be external, love for one's neighbour is deeper-lying: it involves the person more profoundly. The two central values of justice and love for one's neighbour may conflict. Justice may be loveless, love may be unjust (Hartmann 2003, p. 271). Tied to love of one's neighbour are the virtues of sincerity, loyalty, humility, and behaviour.

The third and final group is by far the most indeterminate; it may not even be a real and proper group of virtues. It comprises the value of the personality, personal

love, love for the ‘distant one’ and future-sightedness, responsibility for future generations.[5]

The value of the personality, unlike the other values mentioned thus far, is not a general value. It can be understood as the individual *ethos* which each of us must accomplish, but we may always fail to accomplish. Also personal love, like the value of the personality, is oriented solely to the individual: it is the value of a strictly personal relationship of joint accomplishment.

With love for the ‘distant one’ and future-sightedness we return to general values. The distinctive feature of these values is that we can expect nothing from them in return. The discovery of love for the distant one was made by Nietzsche, who called it thus in order to contrast it with love for one’s neighbour (Nietzsche 1999).

8. Values of good and bad

The person-realizing values are eminently values of good and bad. We know at least some of the difficulties that hamper definition of good and bad. With respect to the person, good and bad relate to each other like merit and guilt. This means that for a person badness is not an error, a deficiency or a lack. A bad person is not someone who lacks something. A bad person is just as much a person as a good person. S/he is a person who has not chosen the good and bears responsibility for it.

A clarification is now necessary. Perhaps the most important lesson that we have learnt from Socrates is that human beings never choose the bad because it is bad. Even when they choose a disvalue, they do so because they think that it is a value. Every purpose, *qua* purpose, is a value.

Socrates’ intuition is fundamental for ethical discourse because it allows disvalue to be defined as the choice of the lesser value. Suppose that we must choose between A and B. If A and B are comparable and the value of A is greater than the value of

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[5] Hartmann 2003, p. 317. Da Re 1996, p. 188 points out that Hartmann does not mention the typical bourgeois virtues of diligence, parsimony, etc.

B, we regard the choice of A as good and the choice of B as bad. This elementary situation demonstrates the importance of Brentano's analysis of the preference relation. On the other hand, the situation's intrinsic shortcoming is the assumption that values are comparable and therefore organizable into a single hierarchy.

A final remark is relevant: if ethical good and evil are in the tendency toward some purpose, then not only are the values of virtue involved, but the person-constituting values also have a role to play, although it is a subordinate one. By way of example, consider the difference between being narrow-minded and broad-minded. To the extent that the subject chooses one of the two options, s/he bears responsibility for it.

9. The strength and height of values

I distinguish between two organizing principles of values: that of strength and that of height. These two principles operate in opposite directions: the strongest values are also the least high values, whilst the highest values are the least strong ones. Usually, the lower values, the stronger ones, are also the simplest values; the superior values are the most complex.

Values of goods are stronger than values of person, but they are not as high as the latter.

The theory of values which uses the criteria of strength and height has consequences which at first sight seem surprising, but prove to be correct when considered carefully. The main consequence is this: from an ethical point of view, violating a lower value is more serious than violating a higher value. On the other hand, fulfilling a higher value has greater value than fulfilling a lower value: "sinning against lower values is ignominious, shameful, revolting, but their fulfilment only reaches the level of decency, without rising above it. Offending against higher values, by contrast, does indeed have the character of moral failure, but nothing of the directly degrading, while fulfilment of these values may have something uplifting, liberating, indeed thrilling about it" (Hartmann 2003, p. 53). By

way of example: "heroism warrants admiration, but a lack of heroism arouses neither contempt nor indignation". On the other hand, whilst trustworthiness warrants respect, "a lack of trustworthiness warrants contempt or even indignation" (Hartmann 2003, p. 450).

The ultimate rationale for the principles of strength and height resides in the general nature of the levels of reality. These principles therefore orient the entire spectrum of the real and are not restricted to the particular case of actions which fulfil or violate values. The organization of the strata of reality reflects the law of strength. Although there are conditions which limit the efficacy of the law, it nevertheless performs a crucial role in organizing the strata.[6]

The strata are also subject to a law of freedom whereby the higher level is always free from the lower one. The higher level is defined with respect to a *novum* which distinguishes it from the levels that precede it and function as its bearers. As Hartmann puts it: the strength of the lower structure is only "as building stones, as material" (Hartmann 2003, p. 448 and elsewhere).

The freedom relationship holds between values of person and values of goods, as well as internally to them. Multiplicities of values organized in terms of strength and height are also present in the contexts of values of person and values of goods. These too, therefore, are organized in a way such that the higher level is free from those beneath it.

The strength of a value indicates the gravity of its violation. The height of a value expresses the merit deriving from its fulfilment. Offence and merit proceed in parallel but are not identical.

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[6] More thorough analysis should explicitly compare Hartmann's theory of the levels of reality with other theories developed in recent years. For most recent developments see Poli 2006b,c,d. In my theory, the presence of bifurcations in the levels, 'interwoven' levels, the possibility of 'downwards' causal effects – from higher levels to lower ones – and the forms of anticipation that characterize all levels from the life level onwards, produce a theory very different from Hartmann's. As a first approximation, however, it is convenient to maintain the latter.

Offending against life is a grave offence and has very little merit. More in general, harm to material goods is more serious than harm to spiritual goods (Hartmann 2003, p. 453). But fulfilment of spiritual goods, and ethical goods in particular, is a merit much greater than the merit corresponding to respect for more elementary goods.

Respect for more elementary goods is often the condition for acceding to higher goods. Those who violate lower goods are wicked. But the reverse does not hold: a person who violates higher goods, someone who fails to fulfil them, "is not on that account a bad man; his conduct threatens no one; it merely lacks the higher moral content" (Hartmann 2003, p. 440).

Structuring by levels is important not only because it furnishes us with the tectonic laws governing values, but also because it provides us with criteria to distinguish, at least in some cases, authentic values from bogus ones. If the architecture of values is based on levels of dependence, then the authentic elevation of value is also divided into levels; it develops through intrinsic stages from the lower values to the higher ones. Although the situation may still lack full theoretical analysis, it is well known in practice. A person whose behaviour is oriented to a higher value, but does not simultaneously respect the values that support it, is structurally discordant. The higher values to which s/he refers are not credible. Loving with distrust or giving with cowardice are not authentically virtuous behaviours (Hartmann 2003, p. 456). Values are constructed step by step, proceeding from the most elementary levels upwards.

10. Atlases of values

I have discussed the two dimensions – of strength and of height – along which values are organized. A third values-organizing component consists of proximity relations among homogeneous types of value. I shall call a family of values an 'atlas'. The realm of values is therefore a series of atlases (which may have zones in

common) with different levels of strength and height. The latter characterizes the structure of the atlas.

Many aspects of values are still obscure, because we do not know the dynamics operating among the various atlases. Some dynamics depend on the person subject to the value – his/her age and maturity, for example – other on historical and social conditionings. Other dynamics are structural and depend on how the atlases are arranged, and on their intrinsic strength.[7]

In figurative terms, an atlas map can be viewed as an island. The set of atlases forms an archipelago. The currents represent the forces that flow from one atlas to its neighbour.

Unfortunately, we are still trying to draw the maps of individual values, and we are not yet able to draw the overall map of the entire realm of values.

11. Between hope and responsibility

The person-constituting values include stance-taking, commitment, anticipation (meaning the person's broad or narrow outlook on the future), purposefulness (the capacity to set goals and find the means to achieve them), and freedom. This multidimensional network of values is structurally future-oriented. A person is a forward-looking entity. Assuming responsibility for the future is constitutive feature of the person: an inability to look forward debases and falsifies the person.

As we know, however, the person-constituting values are not yet ethical values. Those that we have just seen are therefore the preconditions for ethical stance-taking. This set of conditions find direct ethical supplementation in the third group of values of virtue, which includes the values of love for the 'distant one' and future-sightedness, and therefore responsibility for future generations. Apparently, we have

[7] Not to be confused with the strength of the values making up the map.

reasons to start seeing good and bad as embedded in the *tendencies* towards values and disvalues.

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