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Learning how to decide: a theory on moral development inspired by the ethics of Leonardo Polo

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ABSTRACT

This study sets out the main points in Leonardo Polo's theory of moral development, which systematically articulates goods, norms, and virtues. To make them easier to understand, each point has been compared with Kohlberg's theory of moral development, which is well known to specialists and radically different to it. We have chosen three aspects of Kohlberg's theory of moral development to highlight the uniqueness of Polo's theory: a) Kohlberg does not account for the specificity of voluntary acts, particularly the act of deciding; b) The options that solve Kohlberg's dilemmas are isolated from potential prior and subsequent decisions, so his moral development ignores any internal biographical story-line to the decisions themselves; and c) The Kohlbergian morality is an ethics of justice and duty, thereby relegating the friendship, which to Polo is the culmination of ethics, to a morally irrelevant level.

"If all time is eternally present all time is unredeemable."

-T. S. Eliot. *Four Quartets*

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is not to give yet another critique of a paradigm of moral education in decline, the Kohlbergian paradigm (Kristjánsson 2017), but rather, to use it as a counterpoint to put forth a theory of moral development that draws on the philosophy of Leonardo Polo, which diverges sharply from Kohlberg's.

However, the reason for using Kohlberg's theory of moral development as a counterpoint to Polo's theory is not only because it displays some occasional disagreements. The Kohlbergian paradigm has been replaced by a fragmented, Babel-like ethics incapable of achieving the complexity that is *consubstantial* to ethics, and of filling the void it left behind (Kristjánsson 2021). What makes Kohlberg's theory so interesting as a counterpoint to Polo is that it is

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effectively a paradigm. In other words, its nature is not fragmentary but instead comprises a consistent vision of moral development supported by initial decisions with solid anthropological-philosophical roots. It adds a formal ethics to Piaget's theory of psychological development, and this combination is understood as a gradual rapprochement, from the perspective of an empirical self with the tendencies and appetites typical of its empirical state, to the point of view of a transcendental or *synnomic* subject that can elevate any of the moral maxims that guide its behavior to the status of a universal law.

In this way, the theories compared take their disagreements to core questions, not to occasional differences in outlook or opinion. Behind the fundamental choices Kohlberg takes is a radical way of conceiving the human being and its excellence or *areté*. This being is shown to us *in transit* from a particular point of view, which seeks goods for it and for its loved ones and is dependent on particular subjective conditions, towards another more elevated and truer point of view, which is typical of a subject that does not identify with any particular subjective state, but instead becomes independent or separates itself from all of them. In other words, with Kohlberg we return to the *eternal question* of whether the cause of the morally reproachable is the ignorance of someone who is only capable of seeing from a constrained point of view because he does not know his true nature, which will only be revealed to him through wisdom, or whether moral evil is dependent not only on ignorance but above all on voluntary choice (*boulêsis*). This is the ancient dispute between the two great followers of Socrates: Plato and Aristotle. Ultimately, it is a question of whether virtue is fundamentally knowledge, as Socrates asserted, or if knowledge, as Aristotle claimed, was of little or no value for ethical virtue (1934 [EN 1105b 2–3]).

From the start Kohlberg adopts the focus that human beings are fundamentally cognizant beings, and his theory of moral development is a theory of cognitive development. Therefore, what is most radical is knowledge, and so the will (volition) becomes instead an obstacle in the transit towards moral perfection, which is a form of cognitive perfection: a way of seeing and judging that is followed by a way of conducting oneself without any other relevant instance mediating between them.

Polo's theory of moral development, little known to non-Spanish-speaking scholars, follows in the Aristotelean-Thomist tradition on this matter while adding new contributions worthy of the attention of specialists. Thus, the article also joins the growing interest in a moral education inspired to a greater or lesser extent on Aristotle's ethics (Carr, Arthur, and Kristjánsson 2017), but updated to be able to take on the broad task of integration while sidestepping potential reductionisms.

We have divided this article into three aspects from Kohlberg's theory, identifying their difficulties or shortcomings from the point of view of Polo. After each of these three aspects, we set out Polo's theses about the will, its decisions, and its habits, which could confront these three difficulties. By separating each of the three theses and their respective counter-theses, the present work takes the form of a debate between two divergent points of view from their own foundations.

However, before this, we must first contextualize Polo's theory about decisions and how to improve them habitually within his anthropology, his ethics and his way of understanding education.

2. Anthropology, ethics, and education in Polo

Polo's work is very extensive. His Complete works published in Spanish fill twenty-seven volumes. Polo takes an interest in everything from metaphysics to ethics, from the theory of knowledge to anthropology, from psychology to the philosophy of law, etc. To provide an introduction for the English-speaking reader who is unfamiliar with Leonardo Polo's ideas (above all owing to the difficulty of translating it into other languages), we will briefly set out the essential points of his anthropology, and how his ethics and theory of education are consequences of it. Thus, in the context of his ethics and anthropology, we will frame his theory about ethical development as a *progressive dominion over decisions*, thanks to the virtues of prudence.

2.1. *The* transcendental expansion *or* openness *in anthropology*

Polo carried out a *transcendental expansion* in anthropology because 'the being (*esse*) of man is not the being with which metaphysics concerns itself' (2016b, p. 338). However, this expansion or *openness* was not merely methodical, i.e. it did not entail simply enlarging a pre-established list; rather, it also had a methodical sense. In other words, expansion *was* the human being itself, specifically its personal being, which is understood as coexistence. Transcendental anthropology is the doctrine of human *co-being*: 'Man is not limited to being, but co-is' (2016a, p. 42). According to Polo, Heidegger arrived at a similar idea with his notion of *Mitsein* (being-with) but did not develop it sufficiently.

Medieval scholasticism developed a complex doctrine regarding metaphysical transcendentals. Starting from reality and heading towards its ultimate principle or its universal cause, we arrive at the absolute metaphysical transcendentals such as the being (entity). And insofar as there are two powers in the human being that correspond to the being or *ens*, namely understanding and will, the relative transcendentals of truth and good are obtained.

The transcendentals, on the other hand, become one with each other (they said '*convertuntur*'). This means that, from everything from which one of them can be predicated, all the others can be predicated.

However, this philosophy does not adequately consider the free being because it does not differentiate it sufficiently from the being that metaphysics considers. Nonetheless, 'a founded freedom is contradictory' (2016a, p 36). If human understanding and will are metaphysical transcendentals, the person who possesses these powers must also be transcendental, albeit in a completely different way given that the person is transcendental precisely insofar as it coexists knowing and loving the being. Its transcendentalism is found not in the direction of the foundation, of a universal principle or cause, but rather in the line of the *trans-operative*. We must look towards the origin of the immanent operations of will and intelligence thanks to which the person wants or desires and knows. No principle is found *on this side* of the operation of knowing because to know is not to cause, since the object known in the mind is unreal. What is found *on this side* of the operation of knowing is *trans-immanent*, i.e. the free or spiritual (Polo 2016a, 37–38).

This expansion or openness is carried out thanks to a method called 'the abandonment of the mental limit,' which basically entails avoiding extrapolating the actuality (being-in-act) and supposition of what is thought to reality. Physical reality is not in act but in potency (a conclusion that quantum physics also reached through entirely experimental methods) (Heisenberg 2013), nor is spiritual reality, which is *more* than in act. These transcendentals are: coexistence, intimacy, personal freedom, love as giving and intellection as a *co-act*.

In this way, realism in anthropology reinforces metaphysical realism. From Polo's transcendental anthropology, being or existing extra-mentally or apart from the mind, which is the realist thesis, means that the human being is *the second* being (*esse*) with regard to which there is a *primary being* or *principles* that correspond to the being of metaphysics.

The human being coexists with the being of metaphysics precisely as its expansion or openness (Polo 2016a, 43). Metaphysics, as Aristotle says, is *first philosophy* because it concerns itself with the principle, but 'being principle does not mean being free' (2016b, p. 338). Where 'freedom is discovered, or where freedom appears, is, precisely, in anthropology' (2016b, p. 339). The human being is free insofar as it is a *second being*, i.e. that it is by *adding itself* to the first reality or the being as principle (2016b, p. 345).

Being-with also refers to beings who, in turn, coexist with one another, that is to say, to the plurality of people or co-existents who co-live in the world because of their essential manifestations. Rather than something shared, like human nature, the essence of each person is the growth or honing of this nature by means of the habits of intelligence and the will. Each person's essence is manifestative of it because this growth or honing is not natural, but instead

depends on personal freedom. In other words, it is a fundamentally ethical honing. Each person must safeguard and enrich his/her essence, which is equivalent to his/her own soul.

According to Polo, Thomas Aquinas was unable to adapt anthropology to fit the real distinction (*distinctio realis*) he established between the being (*esse*) as an act (*actus essendi*) and the essence (*essentia*) as power:

> Aquinas barely explores the real distinction of the being and the essence in man. Therefore, it must be added that, insofar as the essence of man depends on his personal being, there is no drawback to admitting that it is a non-finite power. Strictly speaking, the infinity of the essence of man resides in a dimension of his that was already discovered by Aristotle (2016a, p. 119).

This dimension is habit (*héxis*). Because of habits, every human being's intelligence (and will and, therefore, essence) is unlimited power or a power without a maximum.

For its part, freedom, apart from a practical nature that belongs to the order of essence, that is to say, to the predicamental order, has a transcendental nature that is in the order of the *actus essendi* or of personal being (*esse*) (Polo 2016b, 2017). Polo describes this personal or transcendental freedom as *the capacity not to defuturize the future* (2016a, p. 217), i.e. being free means maintaining a future that does not run out while one lives, which never elapses and becomes past. To be free means to be at an advantage with respect to the passage of time. It is an openness to the future without anticipating it or bringing it into the present (because this would *defuturize* it). To be free is to always maintain the I-will-be.

2.2. Polian ethics: prudence, justice and friendship

Thus, on the one hand, we have the act of personal being, which is *converted* with anthropological transcendentals such as personal love, and on the other, the essence of each person, with its powers, such as will and intelligence, with their operations and habits, as well as the body and its sensitivity.

This real distinction explains Polo's ethics. If ethical or moral perfection is essential, voluntary loving or reaching out depends on transcendental love the same way the means depends on its end. Ethics, which in Polo are an ethics of virtues, goods, and rules, are therefore a means. The end is not moral good, nor is it compliance with rules or the acquisition of virtues, but rather loving another. However, the capacity to love another or to requite it clearly increases if one seeks moral good, virtue, and complies with moral rules. Hence the importance of the virtuous nature, because it is not possible to be true friends with someone who lacks the necessary constancy in this nature, i.e. with someone who cannot be loyal.

Prudence is the basis on which all ethics is constructed, as thanks to prudence we can freely dominate our decisions. However, prudence is connected to justice, because it is necessary to be prudently just. With justice we move from an ethics of prudence in which goods are means to an end, to an ethics in which there are goods that are ends in themselves (the others), and among which it is necessary to distribute goods justly (Polo 2016a).

However, Polo takes a step further and connects the ethics of justice to friendship, as Aristotle also does (1934 [1155a 26–28]). Lack of friends is the worst thing for Aristotle (1984 [1235a1-2]). Polo, however, does not reach this conclusion through Aristotle, but rather through his transcendental anthropology, which regards the person as radically coexistent.

Two people can love one another, but this only becomes a true rapport through coexistence and interaction that is always mediated by their respective essences. They give the goods that they can dispose of, they do favors by disposing of things in a particular way, but they cannot give themselves, i.e. they cannot give a personal nature to their gift (for catholic theology the Holy Spirit is a person who *is* a gift). They can't put it in the palm of his own hand and say: 'take it, it's for you,' because people cannot dispose of themselves, of their personal being. For this reason, they should manifest their personal love by giving goods to others (goodwill or benevolence). This is the key to Polo's anthropology: transcendental, personal love must constitute the voluntary will, which is in the predicamental or essential order. This is the gift structure of man (the *donal* structure): personal or transcendental love must be completed with the essential or predicamental gift, which is goodwill.

In this way, the end of ethics is friendship, while other goods, including virtues, are means through which this friendship is manifested and becomes operative.

In this way, personal love is not subordinated to the transcendental good of which metaphysics speaks. What is subordinated to the good is the voluntary will or tendency, which is essential, but not personal love, which is transcendental, and only enhances itself with another personal love that manifestly corresponds to it, in which case we have friendship.

Practical reason is incapable of presenting the will with a good such as the person, because it always presents it with particular goods, and a person is not a particular good. In this way, voluntary tendency is directed at the person only thanks to its increase. Personal love encourages voluntary tendency, not to maintain itself but to increase itself: 'when it is about another person, the only way that loving him is not solely intentional with regards to his qualities is to want him [voluntary will or tendency] more and more' (Polo 2016a, 486).

And this increase is precisely what is achieved with ethical habits: increasing wanting, reaching-out-to, and, consequently, the capacity for friendship.

2.3. *Ethics, education, and* affective normality

This ethics according to which the end is friendship has very important consequences on education. If friendship is the purpose of ethics, education fundamentally involves increasing the capacity to be a good friend, i.e. the capacity for coexistence, which constitutes the essential perfection of the self (Pérez Guerrero and Millán Ghisleri 2021).

We are educated for friendship and through friendship. For example, true interests are something that cannot be imposed. A young person can pretend to have them to please his educators, but only he knows if he has them. Interests, which are *principles* for education, are usually shared among friends (Nussbaum 1990, 2013; Polo 2019). Therefore, Polo encourages parents and teachers alike to make friends with their children and pupils so that their interests are ever more valuable and less egocentric (2019).

Furthermore, education in affectivity is, for Polo, the first education, not only in the sense that it is the typical form of the family or domestic sphere, the initial educational phase, but that it is the basis on which technical, scientific, and ethical education should be built.

Education in affects can harmonize the dictates of practical reason and appetites. A healthy affectivity is one in which moral good is done, not just because it is a duty, but because doing it is pleasing and contemplating others doing it is pleasing.

Polo's notion of *affective normality* is very important in this sense. *Affective normality* is acquired if there is inner integrity or sincerity. This normality exists when, without doing violence to oneself, rational deliberation is fluidly followed by voluntary decision and putting into practice what is judged as most correct (Polo 2019). That is to say, when there is harmony between what practical reason dictates and what the appetitive power desires, and one is one with oneself (Wendelborn 2020).

Polo traces this idea to Kant and his notion that there is an affective perception, a feeling of harmony and agreement between the faculties, which is precisely the judgment of taste or aesthetic judgment of his Third Critique.

To educate is essentially to help create habits, to enhance each person's essence (the capacity to know and to want). But these habits require a first education in affects: in what is pleasing and what is displeasing, as Plato and Aristotle also affirmed: 'Hence the importance, as Plato points out, of having been definitely trained from childhood (*neoi*)to like and dislike the proper things; this is what good education means (*paideía*)' (1934 [1104b11-13]).

Furthermore, this correct initial affective education is key to the development both the young person's memory and his or her imagination (2019).

3. Kohlberg's moral development as the development of moral judgment

The critique of Kohlberg given here is based on three approaches that we then use as steppingstones to a Polian theory on moral development.

The dilemmas Kohlberg used are not really 'accounts of generally hypothetical situations that present a conflict of values and the need to make a decision accordingly,' as Linde (2009, 8) assures, since solving them does not require deciding or choosing in the strict sense, since the will never acts *ex hypothesi*. Consequently, the decisions and choices students truly make have to do with how the interviews or exercises based on the dilemmas unfold rather than on the situations described in the dilemmas.

Silverstein and Trombetti (2013) note that, aside from the subject's affective state, no assessment can be made of the moral disposition of his response. Furthermore, as Aristotle stated, 'all moral goodness is concerned with pleasures and pains. For our state of character is related to and concerned with such things as have the property of making every person's spirit worse and better' (1884 [1221b32-36]).

Reason does not decide without concurrence of the will; rather, it deliberates. Kohlberg's theory of moral development ignores the will, which he equates with the *ego* as personal factors unnecessary to moral action, since the space between moral judgment and moral action is filled only with conditions that strengthen or weaken their mutual connection, which updates moral competence (Kohlberg 1984).

Dilemmas may bring about auxiliary habits out of prudence, such as *gnome*, which is the habit of knowing how to discover exceptions to the rules by turning to more universal principles. However, such auxiliary habits of prudence lack moral character in its absence. Solving dilemmas may therefore be considered an auxiliary and indirect method to forming moral character (Pérez Guerrero 2019) but by no means *evaluative* of that character.

Although Kohlberg's theory is a theory of the development of practical reason, it is not a theory of moral development because it does not take into account the peculiarity of voluntary acts, or the habits that accompany them, which are certainly not a *bag of virtues* because they should not be considered in isolation or analytically. To Kohlberg, the quality of practical reasoning formally determines the level of moral development, which he perceives as *cognitive-evolutive* (Kohlberg 1984).

3.1 Cognoscitive intentionality and voluntary intention

To Polo, who follows Saint Thomas Aquinas in this regard, the intentional in the cognitive act is the known object (the *intentio obiectiva*), whereas the intention of the volitive act is *constitutive* of it. The operation of knowing extends plainly

to the known: it is encompassed by it (Polo 2016a). In contrast, even though voluntary intention does not affect what is wanted, since being wanted is an *extrinsic denomination*, it is inscribed in the very nature of the act of wanting or tending. Polo calls this reaching out or moving towards what is wanted 'intention of another,' in which *the other* is *the extramental good* (2016a). That intention of another may increase or decrease, as if reserving a space for the other in our world, in our life; a space that can vary in size as well as centrality. Human will or intellectual appetite is a power directed by personal love and depends on it (2016a), and differentiates itself distinctly from sensitive appetite, which is activated automatically.

This difference between the intentionalities belonging to both acts requires distinguishing between two different potentialities of the human essence (2016a).

Deliberation is unable to stop itself, since it can always be resumed later. Therefore, its halt can be considered a mere postponement. What really brings an end to deliberation is voluntary decision or choice, because from that moment on, what happens next is *another* deliberation. Deliberation ends with a sort of shift or change in activity.

3.2 Volition as a natural tendency and the voluntary as a free act

Because of that new consecutive activity, actions can be said to involve willingness. However, the will is also a natural, innate tendency in human beings. What corresponds to that tendency is the good alone, or said another way, the will is the correspondence in us to the good alone or *simpliciter* (2013).

Moral decisions are not correct because they are fit for their purpose; rather, because they are suited to an ultimate end to which the intentions themselves may be diverted. This means that decisions are not sovereign, but instead are subject to an *a priori* order that obligates them. Aristotle called that end '*eudaimonía*,' meaning happiness, which in Latin is translated as *felicitas*. The ultimate goal and therefore the good is determined by nature. Thus, 'will is fully dominated and is not free' (2016a, p. 77). Will has to do with freedom only at a second stage, when reason steps in. With the concurrence of reason and the *a priori* nature of ethical rectitude comes another key notion in Polo's systemic ethics: moral law or norm.

As Biesta (2021) notes, first comes that which is given to us, but giving cannot take place, there is no gift until it is accepted. This acceptance of the gift of happiness is the equivalent of the commitment or adhesion of the ego. Polo calls this 'simple wanting' (2016a): an act that is purely *effusive*, gratuitous, and habitual. This act is neither acquired nor chosen (which would make no sense at all) but innate. It is an innate habit or habitual act (*héxis*).

As a tendency to good, i.e. considered as nature, the will or tendency *calls* to the ego, such that if the ego does not obey that call, it does not constitute an act of free will.

Being called, despite its imperative nature: 'Want good,' is accepted simply with the habitual act of wanting good. This thesis of Polo's is broad in its scope. To Polo, the *voluntas ut natura*, according to scholastic terminology, is the purely potential, passive phase of the will (*voluntas*). The will (*voluntas*) would have this status disconnected from the objects provided to it by reason: a transcendental relation that can only be said to be determined by its end, by whatever it tends toward, but about which nothing is known without the concurrence of reason. The volition is not spontaneous, but rather, is intimately assisted by the person with ego adhesion. Voluntary acts must be constituted by the adhesion of the ego: 'in the expression "I want," there can be no wanting without the I' (Polo 2016a, 483).

Human essence is life considered as a personal manifestation (2016a). Each person's essence is an intrinsic, boundless perfection that can be discovered as a growing disposition, increasingly available or arranging things in a certain way.

The ego is considered as the apex of that growth (Polo 2016a): an innate, *dual* habit that Polo calls 'synderesis' (from '*syn-dokeo*' and '*syn-diaskopeo*,' i.e. 'examining together' and 'seeming good to both'), because intelligence and will depend on synderesis. Synderesis (ego) is not a subject (the self, considered as a subject, *closes, ipso facto*, the anthropological transcendental openness), but is like personal freedom *interested* in certain matters and certain topics. Said another way, it is personal intimacy that abandons its silence to dispose of what is available in a particular way, and thus manifests itself and gets attention and gives it (Polo 2016a).

The duality of synderesis consists of *see-ego* and *want-ego*. Polo uses this dual formula to avoid seeing the ego as a unique subject or supposition of seeing and wanting (2016, p. 333) because as a supposition, the real self is completely ignored (the thought-out ego does not think, as Polo often says).

The second member of the dual habit, the *want-ego*, is therefore not a voluntary act. Rather, it is the innate habitual act that makes the voluntary possible: 'the will becomes destroyed if it refuses to want. But its first act cannot go against it' (2016a, p. 423). This would be incongruous. For Polo, *want-ego* is the illumination of will itself, which equates to its innate congruence: by wanting good *simpliciter*, the will makes itself congruent, and that congruence is its own luminosity (2016a). The illumination of synderesis is superior, more intimate, to that of moral conscience.

Paralyzing want corresponds with an acquired obstinance that does not manage to constitute any voluntary act. From the start, the *simpliciter* wanting is effusive, although it needs many other acts for said effusiveness to manifest itself fully: 'man's essence is freely effusive, and that means we can deny ourselves effusiveness, we can refuse. This is where the "yes-no" distinction appears, which is derived' (2017, p. 74).

Every free act is thus offering in its origin or roots (2016a) and the human essence is favor (2016a). Freedom is not a feature of voluntary acts. Rather, it is the effusiveness that comes from personal love: to want or tend to the other.

3.3 The ego and the curvature of will in Polo

The truth of will is its consistency, i.e. its curvature: a want-wanting or a wanting-oneself as *the one who wants something*, without which it would be impossible to want anything freely:

> The act of wanting falls not only on the good but also on itself: this is what may be called want-wanting. However, insofar as want turns upon want, it goes beyond the notion of appetition, and clearly involves freedom. Following this suggestion, it is suiting to raise the act of personal being up from the voluntary (Polo 2016a, 77).

Want-wanting is not a second-level volition, but rather a want-wanting-more (an increase in wanting) reinforced or encouraged by the personal love. Wanting the good is not an act detained and fenced in by its object, like objective knowing. Rather, the intention itself of the voluntary act is only constituted if the ego remains faithful to it, without failing to assist or care for it. Here is where the habits of will come into play, because without habits, such faithfulness is not possible. The want keeps turning toward the good if it obligates itself to keep wanting more. Without this curvature of wanting, the intention of another or the intention of the end would not be maintained. If an object is thought about and then stops being thought about, that stopping has no effect on the object, but if one wants something and then stops wanting, the wanting it is destroyed. If the other is wanted but not incessantly, the act of wanting disappears.

New decisions may or may not uphold previous ones. Therefore, the characteristic faithfulness of voluntary commitment does not mean that the ego becomes fatally determined by a decision because life goes on, because there is still time.

With this faithfulness comes the notion of duty or obligation, which is another fundamental component of Polo's ethics: 'good deeds *ought not* go unattended. "I must" means that the good deed obligates not failing to constitute it. Obligating oneself is binding oneself' (Polo 2016a, 484).[1] Synderesis sheds light on the deep meaning of the obligation: the pure essence of simple want is obligating oneself (thus far we are with Nietzsche) (Heidegger 2013) for personal love (here we leave Nietzsche).

4. Kohlbergian ethics as a moral without biography

Choosing or opting from among feasible alternatives or solving an uncertainty does not necessarily have the moral nature it is assumed to have. Choosing calls for the opening of alternatives. However, a choosing is not free by the mere fact

of solving an uncertainty or an alternative. Whether the act is free will depend on the quality of the decision that has resolved the indeterminacy, i.e. the degree of control over it. But this control or dominion is dependent on the succession of decisions and the generated prudential habit.

In this respect, the limitation of Kohlberg's dilemmas is the isolated nature of the options that must be taken regarding antecedent decisions and especially, subsequent potential decisions. However, over isolated options, little dominion can be held, and in that regard, they are scarcely free.

4.1. The habitual dominion over decisions according to Polo

The extent to which decisions are free depends on how much *dominion is exercised on them*. This dominion can be increased by starting off *from ever more advantageous positions* thanks to prudence that can thusly *resume and correct* previous decisions. And this makes it necessary to underscore the open, non-isolated nature of such previous decisions.

What this means is that the most important decision is always *the next one*. There is an openness to the future that can give a *felicitous* (*makários*) or *propitious* (in other words, *promising*) biographical meaning to decisions. If life as a whole is *destinable*, the Aristotelian *eudaimonist* view should be extended in a transcendental or *enchanted* sense, as Kristjánsson (2016) suggests. Meaning and beauty can be found in a biography even if it is riddled with moral errors and misfortunes.

4.2. Wanting and opening up to the future in Polo's Theory

There is a resolutive and preceptive nature to deciding in that it marks the end of a previous deliberative situation. Decision *comes* from a *previously* deliberated opinion, as Aristotle says (1884 [1226b8-9]. A decision is final *only* in that it heralds the end of *previous* deliberation. By this reason, decisions do not fatally or finally determine the ego.

Polo insists that an ethically correct action is always a *corrected action*: 'We may be wrong when we present a good as absolute, and we may convince ourselves by experience that it does not make us completely happy. Correction is inherent to practical reason' (2013, p. 257). We often pull too tightly on will toward something before knowing it fully (2013), so virtue consists above all of straightening, as Aristotle says, an inclination that tends to become twisted.

There needs to be a continuity in our choices such that subsequent choices can be considered as a kind of resuming or update of the previous ones, but from a new starting point. This way, the subsequent decision modifies the earlier ones *a posteriori* as episodes that, after the new decision, point in

a new direction. Past decisions are the same and have the same moral qualification, but their updating has given them a new *chance*, possibly making them more *propitious* or *promising*.

The person's growth or improvement needs time to integrate virtues and later transpose them into new acts by means of, more or less, relaxed deliberation (Ferrer Santos 2014). As Annas points out, the concept of virtue is 'an essentially developmental notion' (2011, p 83).

This is therefore not about any moral relativism. An *a posteriori* moral qualification makes no sense because ethical correctness, as we have seen, affects the action *a priori*, but the decision becomes felicitous, propitious, if it is corrected and reoriented to the transcendent fate of human beings.

As more and more decisions are made and the active use following them, many modifications are made in the situation, from outside interventions, from new information, that can enrich a previously concluded deliberation. In addition, 'sometimes, the relative importance of different goods varies from one situation to the next' (Arthur, Kristjánsson, and Candace 2021, 113). Accordingly, previous decisions are kept open to a continuation that renews them. Sticking to the decision, ratifying it, qualifying it, etc., are new decisions that are not added to the previous ones as mere aggregate. Instead, as Polo states, the acts of wanting push and drive one another (Polo 2016a). All voluntary acts are modalities of *want-ego*, and therefore are internally bound to each other (2016a).

There is always something *inevitably precipitated* about human decisions. When a choice is made, it is unsure whether the choice fits in with the ultimate end, since we never fully know what the ultimate end is (2013). Moreover, as soon as a decision is made, it *escapes* from the cognitive domains of the ego, because deciding means no longer dwelling on the matter. In addition, we make decisions in circumstances and situations that are more or less pressing, and our ability to guess the future is very slight. However, all these imperfections are what keep decisions open to a continuance that can bestow them *a posteriori* with a new qualification insofar as days of an uncertain path to follow.

Learning how to decide mostly has to do with palliating those cognoscitive and appetitive weaknesses, which are cured to a certain extent with a reinforcing of habits and the help of friends. The key to ethical education is therefore the generation of prudence *through real decision making*, and the promotion of friendship of character (Schwartz 2012; Hachin 2017; Kristjánsson 2020).

Future decisions depend on past decisions, since the latter open a set of factual possibilities and close others, but to a certain extent, past decisions also depend on future decisions. Past decisions are a particular want that can take on a more correct form in the new decisions. Thus, we can speak of a reassessment of the past, since it is not simply something that has already happened, but

something whose destiny can change in the future depending on how that future is employed. One does not devote only one part of life to another. Rather, life can be devoted wholly from its start to its finish. This is key to the debate on whether life has an ultimate meaning. Ethics is what straightens *all* of life toward its destiny (2019).

4.3 The open nature of human decisions and the need for virtues in Polo

The impossibility in this life of reaching the ultimate end corrects Aristotelean ethics and sets 'the eminence of the future in human biographical time: we live open to a future that never ends, i.e. a future that never stops being the future. The future is not *unfuturizable* as long as we are alive' (2013, p 265).[2]

As life goes on, it is possible to resume deliberation from a new, more advantageous start. The nexus for speaking about resuming and not a simple succession of acts is thus the habits that *accompany* the decisions. Ethical virtue helps string decisions together, because virtue, as a reinforcement that orients the will more insistently toward the unrestricted good, makes the will never be satisfied with any limited good. There is a diachronic aspect in Aristotelean ethics that is often overlooked (Sanderse 2015). Virtue is the increase or decrease in wanting, not a sort of accommodating state. The virtuous person constantly corrects decisions by re-updating them, bringing them up to date, to the *now* of the current decision and opening it to a better future.

This *crescendo* is the internal connection between decisions, not merely chronological, but in depth. The tendency to the unrestricted good becomes a want-wanting-more good. In contrast, if there is no habit to strengthen that orientation to the unrestricted good of the will, decisions lose that *internal storyline* that *a posteriori* can give them a *felicitous* or *propitious* nature.

Therefore, decisions should not be considered in isolation. Nor, as Aristotle says, should virtues be considered separately, as if each were independent of the others (1934 [1144b32-34]). We may also add that the misfortunes and setbacks of life should not be so categorically claimed to offset the moral good of virtue, as Nussbaum states in his conscientious study on Classical Greece (2013), since those misfortunes are often accompanied by revelations or *epiphanies* that spur on an unexpected, abrupt development of virtue in people who have been accustomed to wrongdoing since childhood (Kristjánsson 2015, 2016).

5. Kohlberian moral development ends with nobody´s ethics

Kohlberg's higher state of development (Level 3, State 6, Type B) is characterized by its *synnomic attitude of the ego*, that takes on the point of view of *any rational person* (Kohlberg 1984). This is the ethics of justice. But the ethics of justice must be open to gift or favor. The ethics of gift or favor is one that is fulfilled with

duty, but it would also be done if it were not a duty. This is the central thesis behind the so-called *ethics of care*, but perhaps without having been able to formulate it correctly (Medina-Vicent 2016). It is the ethics that Kant called 'positive duties of affection or benevolence' (Kant 1988, 23–27), which remains impartial and non-exclusive, but in which the *generalized other* of Rawls (1999) and Habermas 1999, Habermas 2000) acquires a face: it is *someone with a name* who requires or needs me. The ethics of gift and care, as long as it is a true favor, that is, a gift that is accepted and open to reciprocity or correspondence, so as not to nullify the initiative and freedom of the other, crowns ethical development and is part of friendship. This is why Cicero states that it is good for friends to have needs, because it is the way we can benefit (from *bene-facere*: doing good) (Cicerón 1993).

Kohlberg's ethical development is an ethic of justice and duty, which has to be open to an ethic of gift or favor, in which there is no *synnomic* ego, i.e. an ego that is any ego, and is a means serving the true end that crowns ethics, which is friendship. The *synnomic ego* is alone: it has no one who speaks to it or asks about it or pays it any attention at all. In short, it truly is *nobody*.

5.1. *The dual criterion of ethical correctness in Polo*

To Polo, the criterion of moral correctness is dual. Volition readjusts to its end, which is the unrestricted good, the want or volition continuously increasing, since there ineluctably exists a mismatch between the finite goods offered by practical reason and the ultimate end of the will. Nevertheless, that increase must come about in a coordinated fashion between both extremes in the relation between the want and the wanted good. In other words, one must know how to choose the greater good while also increasing another's intention. The other, naturally, is the end. The intention of another equates to the subordination of the tendency (*volition*) to its end. A completely curved or reflexive will as in Nietzsche is not possible. The other is the good that is wanted (the metaphysical good), but, above all, it is the one for whom the good is wanted: the beneficiary of the good: 'The moral or operated good is higher than the metaphysical good as an endorsement of personal love, i.e. as the capacity for friendship, the culmination of the ethics of virtue.'

5.2. *Personal love and the increase of wanting or tending*

In Polo, ethics opens and culminates in the *concordant duality* among coexisting people, among personal beings, which is friendship. Friendship is more than a virtue or is a *dual* virtue, not isolated from the other, because one is only someone's friend who likewise considers himself as that one's friend.

The growing want, the want that wants more and better, aims at the person, at the who. Wanting more does not mean wanting more vehemently or passionately, but rather, aspiring to increase the intention of other inherent in the act of wanting. The act of wanting and the wanted good are not statically balanced. Rather, they grow, to borrow an image from biochemistry, like a double helix. And in that growth, there comes the tendency of the will. In other words, the tendency is towards the unrestricted good by increasing the intention of other. And because of this wanting more that, as we have seen, depends on the curvature of the will, freedom, and loving, which are personal or anthropological transcendentals, they spread out and manifest themselves on the plane of the human essence.

The intention of other would decline into what we call 'attachment' if the wanted good does not likewise increase. Accommodation does not belong to a will open to the unrestricted good and does not generate virtuous habits but accustomizations that do nothing to reinforce/strengthen the will.

The criterion of moral suitability of wanting is therefore dual: there must be a continual readjustment in both directions between that aspiration to wanting to want more and the increase in the wanted good. Thus, it is necessary to ascertain by discovering and correctly choosing the goods that sustain the increase in wanting. In this, Socrates is right: evil and ignorance go hand in hand. But the voluntary act is good in accordance with this dual balance (2016a). No good comes ascribed a priori to wanting (which would turn it into a particular appetite). Similarly, wanting is not disappointed by the inevitable limitation of every feasible good if the goods are meant for others as shows of kindness and loving correspondence.

Wanting must aim at the person, who can correspond to that want with another want, so that, thanks to living side by side, cooperation, dialog, or simply by exchanging glances, that increase in want can be sustained with it achieving all the depth it is capable of.

5.3. The donal character of the person and the purpose of the will

To Polo, man's destiny is not the transcendental good talked about in metaphysics, but to correspond to the fullest love in the most fulfilling way. That is why mankind's destiny is not a state that can ever be reached, because one can never love enough.

Even though the good spoken of by metaphysics is naturally desired, personal freedom is not subordinate to it. Rather, it raises it to the condition of operative manifestation, a showing of love awaiting acceptance. The moral good or operated good is the backbone supporting the metaphysical good (2016a). The purpose of love is not the metaphysical good, but rather, another love (García González 2017). Similarly, loving, as a personal transcendental, is

superior to the transcendental good (Polo 2016a). What is determined to the good or purpose is volition, which is part of the essence of every man, but not the person, who thanks to that superiority, can give the good to someone else.

People are ends to which available goods are meant, prudently chosen and justly distributed. When benevolence adds the intention of being for another to an available good, it turns into a gift only if the other accepts it. That intention adds a new meaning to the end and the means-end relationship, since 'the relationship between giving and accepting is in no way causal' (Ferrer Santos 2014, 94). The gift is not constituted before it is given and accepted, nor are the giving and accepting causal but rather *effusive*. The end understood as a destination is someone else, and the means is the good that can be elevated to proof of friendship (*philiká*).

That justifies the expression *eudaimonistic friendship* used by Walker, Curren, and Jones (2016), since thanks to friendship, man achieves a plenitude for which he himself is not enough.

6. Conclusions

For Polo, morally relevant acts are the ones that compromise the ego, i.e. ones that do not only have an external result but also one internal. To Polo, this is because the ego itself is what constitutes the voluntary act with its sustained commitment or adhesion. Clearly, this commitment is absent in the situations posed by Kohlberg's dilemmas, which help develop auxiliary virtues of prudence, such as *synesis* or *gnome*, but that, without the voluntary act, are morally insufficient.

For Kohlberg, the formally moral are the valuative reasonings that uphold moral judgements. The tendency toward happiness (*voluntas ut natura*) or the need for virtue are obviated. However, without habitual reinforcement, there is insufficient connection between moral judgment and moral action, as daily experience reveals.

For Polo, freedom is an *effusive* anthropological transcendental that extends to the human essence thanks to habits that let decisions be corrected by insistently reinforcing the orientation of volition toward good (which is in fact the stamp or disposition they leave on the will). Thus, decisions are free because they form a *continuum* on the line of the increase in wanting. Morally reprehensible decisions are those that stubbornly paralyze that increase, and thereby they neither allow an increase in moral freedom *nor are they truly constituted*. An evil decision does violent to the will, which it lays to waste and devastates.

Decisions open to a future that is not *de-futurizable* in this life because in it, the ultimate end is never reached. Therefore, isolated decisions are like sequences taken from the context of a scene and from a whole story. Unlike in many dramas and narratives in world literature, Kohlberg's dilemmas do not contemplate that biographical continuity of life seen as an assignable or

destinable whole, which is what makes up a student's moral character (Carr and Harrison 2015). In that way, we should note a recent study in which role-switching, the variety of hypotheses and the role of the teacher as devil's advocate enrich the discussion of moral dilemmas by bringing them closer to the narrative schema (Wong 2021).

Polo's ethics culminate in friendship, which exceeds the level of ethics based on prudence (although *phronesis* is still its great resource), on justice (because it makes it unnecessary by excess), and on the goods (since friendship raises them to the category of gifts).

In sum, ethics is a resource in the service of friendship, which is its culmination. The end is to be the best friend possible, especially, of the best friend possible: of the one who always corresponds to love, even if that love is directed at the enemy. Because of that need for correspondence, without which love would be destroyed (Saint Thomas Aquinas 1961 [*C. G. III, c. 151*]) Saint Thomas Aquinas considers evangelical love as friendship with God, even if directed at the enemy (1895 [*S. Th. II–II, q. 23, a. 1, c*]), and it has nothing to do with the generalized philanthropic charity as critically and rightfully discussed by Power and Taylor (2018).

The will seeks out the *simpliciter* good without which it cannot manifest the effusiveness of freedom and of personal love. Goods are precisely the subject matters that freedom has in its reach, by means of virtues (Polo 2016a), that personal love encourages to seek and carry forth through synderesis (ego).

Notes

1. The italics are in the original.
2. The italics are in the original.

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