PHI 202 12/3/14 Individual Perfections

* We’ve focused on Morality, two considerations:
  + Meta-Ethics: Do we have any moral reasons? Why?
  + Normative & Applied Ethics: What are our moral reasons? Utilitarianism, Rawls, Kant. Then look at particular issues and how to act.
* We haven’t considered how moral reasons relate to *other* kinds of reasons in determining what we ought to do.
* What is the role of Moral Reasons in how we should live our lives?
* Susan Wolf- Moral Saints
  + **Assumption**: We always ought to do what we have most MORAL reasons to do
    - **\*\*Moral** reasons are decisive. We should be moral as possible.
* The life we ought to live is that of a moral saint.
* Ways we fall short of this ideal are something to be ashamed. Plausible???
* Susan Wolf- believes it isn’t: “No variant of a moral saint provides compelling personal ideal. It is false that we ought to live morally best life.
* *A personal ideal:* A conception of the best life someone could lead.
* *A moral saint:* Someone who is as morally good as possible. Always does what has most moral reason.
  + **Note:** Moral saints need not achieve the objectively best results—they need not be omniscient. Only respond in what they believe is morally best.
* Question: What does being a moral saint amount to?
  + Pre-theoretical: “common sense” understanding: people whose life is dominated by commitment to improve welfare of others.
  + *The Loving Saint*: (saint out of love);
    - Most people, happiness lies in selfish or not distinctively moral concerns: material comforts, engaging in intellectual and creative activities.
    - That role is played by the commitment to promoting welfare of others.
    - This person finds happiness only in the welfare of others
  + *The Rational Saint:* (saint out of duty); Kant’s ideas
    - Concerns relevant for her happiness are similar to those of most people.
    - But she attaches much more importance to moral concerns that these are *dominant* concerns
    - Rational saint pays little attention to own happiness.
      * Sacrifices on happiness for sake of others’, feels the sacrifice.
  + These 2 people differ considerably regarding motives
    - BUT: shared content of *dominant* concerns yields strong similarities
    - Many personalities compatible with being a moral saint
    - When it comes to action and desires they may be very similar
* Question: in what respects wil moral saints be similar?
  + Moral saint must have and cultivate kinds of qualities that allow her to treat others justly and kindly.
  + A moral saint will have standard moral virtues to a *non-standard* degree
  + Standard moral virtues: patience, consideration, hospitable
* If Assumption was correct, being a moral saint should be the *best* way to live
* Wolf: \*\*\*the moral saint is *not* an appealing ideal.
  + A well-rounded and rich personality has many traits, intersts, and talents, that are *not* morally valuable.
    - Ex. Artistic or athletic talents, having charming or pleasing personality
  + Being a moral saint is incompatible with having and developing these kinds of traits, interst, and talents
* 2 WAYS moral sainthood is incompatible
  + *Practical incompatibility*: dedication to morality make having and developing traits, interest, and talents *impractical*.
  + *Essential incompatibility*: *having and developing some traits, interests, and talents is impossible given moral saint’s virtues. Ex. Sarcastic wit vs. optimistm*
* Why is incompatibility a problem?
  + First, our *actual* ideals *do* have such traits.
    - While our ideals satisfy high moral standard, they also have admirable non-moral traits and interests
  + Second, when we examine moral saints, we find *some* of these traits.
    - We like saint-like personalities if they have some quirks that deduct from moral perfection.
  + We look for people with some high moral standard but non-moral quirks.
* How is this a problem for the Assumption?
  + Objections:
    - 1. Finding *any* devotion to a single type of value too extreme?
      * If yes, objection rests on ideal of “well-roundedness”
      * It would presuppose that well-roundedness is supreme virtue
      * Clearly false
    - This objection misses the force of the conflict and what it teaches
    - 2. All of this shows *nothing* is relevant. Just shows moral sainthood is unattractive ideal.
      * Many explanations for unatractivenss even if Assumption is true
      * Ex. Attractive b/c it reminds us of our weaknesses and vices
    - --Problem is *us* not morality
    - Reply: misses crucial feature of the appearances.
      * But:
        + What A moral saint lacks is not only selfish desire
        + It’s ability to strive for and appreciate a wide variety of forms of personal excellence
        + These qualities are valuable as virtues of a non-moral way.
        + With this view, then we view ourselves as having reasons to promote them. Must be *non-moral* reasons, invisible to saints
        + We prefer other ideals to moral saints, so we don’t think we must do what we have most moral reasons to.
    - Sooooo,
      * Individual perfections is a non-moral source of reasons to act.
      * Legitimate to take these reasons to some significant degree
      * Moral reasons are not *always* decisive.
    - The Assumption is false.
* Question: Does Wolf really show that moral reasons are not always decisive?
  + Maybe the problem is the assumed *content* of morality
    - 1. Maybe Morality has an upper bound.
      * Moral duties determined by stringent but limited set of obligations and constraints.
      * You have deicisve reason to satisfy these, but then to pursue other reasons.
      * \*\*\*Moral reasons are *always* decisive, but not *pervasive*
        + So acting on moral reasons wouldn’t rule out non-morally valuable traits.
    - WOLF: isn’t plausible
      * Would only work if certain kinds of interests e.g. benevolence.
        + Have *no* moral value
        + Have moral value only to a limited extent.
      * BUT: this would deny that the people Wolf calls “moral saints” are noble or morally better than “well-rounded” characters.
    - 2. An alternative explanation is that these “non-moral” virtues are actually are *moral* virtues
      * Ex. One might think that at the heart of morality is individual flourishing/perfection.
      * Moral virtues are ust those traits an individual needs to flourish
      * Wolf would have only said that individual flourishing requires broader range of traits than “traditional” moral virtues
    - Reply: unlikely to succeed.
      * First, unlikely there will only be limited set of valuable ways of achieving human potential
      * Second, something that is morally good gives us a distinctive kind of reason.
      * Reason is very different to ones relevant when something is good from the perspective of individual perfection
      * BUT: part of what is wrong with traditional moral saints is blindness to these reasons
* Lessons for Moral Philosophy
  + So: seems we need to accept moral reasons aren’t always decisive
  + A moral philosophy needs room for supererogation
  + Central Question: what principles do determine what we ought to do?
  + WOLF: \*\*\* it is unlikely such a principle exists