

CHAPTER V

New Ethical Virtues?¹

§1. The Hospital

Scarcely noticed at the end of one rather recent summer in Paris, a new and innovative children's hospital opened in the 15th *Arrondissement*. The hospital opened where two small streets intersect with a much larger one. The nearby Cognacq-Jay Family Foundation had funded the hospital's innovative conception. And the street intersections were a key to understanding the innovation.

The foundation is named for a wealthy Parisian family. The family had founded the famous *Samaritaine* department store, collected eighteenth-century art, and then willed their collection to the people of Paris. The collection is now housed in the Musée Cognacq-Jay.

The museum sits in the beautifully restored, late 16th and early 17th century *Hotél Donon* that stands on the *Rue Elzevier* amid the many other 17th and 18th century Paris town-houses in the Marais in the 4th *Arrondissement*. The site of the museum in the 4th *Arrondissement*, however, is in a very different section of Paris than the much more mixed, modest, and in places impoverished 15th *Arrondissement*. In the 15th is where the new children's hospital is to be found.

After conducting an international architectural competition in 2001, the officers of the Cognacq-Jay Family Foundation

¹ This is a revised version of an invited paper first presented in shorter form at the XXV International Symposium on Eco-Ethics in Copenhagen in October 2006. The paper was first published in the *Revue internationale de philosophie comparée*, 24 (Tokyo, 2010), pp. 83-108 and then in but slightly different and not yet fully revised form in P. McCormick, *Eco-Ethics and An Ethics of Suffering* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2008), pp. 156-186.

entrusted its project to a Japanese architect and to his Japanese-French associates.² Neither at the completion of the new hospital in September 2006 nor at its inauguration several weeks later in October 2006 was there any fanfare. The concern was not to disturb the children.

The children's hospital is in fact mainly not a children's hospital; it is rather a children's hospice. That is, the institution's main objective is providing palliative care for autistic children who are approaching death in the very difficult course of their short and mysteriously troubled lives.

Many aspects of their exceptional situation naturally evoke a deep sadness. They may also provoke sustained reflection on whether anything more might be done substantively to try to alleviate at least some small part of the immensity of their suffering and those of other innocently suffering children in Europe today and elsewhere as well.

What might strike some visitors is the stark contrast between the very great and truly efficacious generosity of the Cognacq-Jay Family Foundation, and the very small and ineffectual capacities of most philosophers to do anything similar. Still, in the face of such a vastness of innocent suffering, might some thoughtful persons, including perhaps even some moral philosophers today, have, if not a hospital to offer for dying autistic children, at least something to offer?

In particular, in walking through the green and white hospice garden what may strike one most is not the truly tragic plight of these particular autistic children. Rather, it is the fact – if that is what it is – that these children are dying prematurely in some strange way. They are dying both homeless and at home.

These children are “homeless” in the sense that they no longer have a regular, fixed place to live. They no longer live where their families live. And, because of their mortal afflictions, the space in which they now live they will not have for very much longer.

² The architect was Toyo Ito and the associates were Yun Yanagisawa, Manuel Tardits, and the garden architects, *Extra Muros* (cf. *Le Monde*, October 24, 2006).

Yet these children are nonetheless “at home” in the sense that they do have a regular, fixed place to live, at least for awhile. That is, each child has a room with a hospital bed looking out on the green and white garden. Yet however regular and fixed that present place is, these children have no permanent residence.

And so these children may be numbered among those without any fixed residence at all. French people today call such persons the “SDF,” the “*sans domicile fixe*,” “those without fixed residence,” or, more strikingly, the “*sans-abri*,” “those without shelter.” English speakers today call such persons “the homeless.”

In retrospect, perhaps the children’s hospice’s most impressive features is its green and white garden. Every day the garden is first green and then white. And every one of the children’s beds has been so situated in the hospice rooms as to look out upon the green and white garden. In its naturalness and its artificiality all at once, the garden is, among things, a work of artistic innovation. As such, this work perhaps might also anticipate an innovation of another order, an ethical innovation.

§2. Generalities

Many persons today not just in Paris and in France, but in the world at large have no fixed residence. In this respect, the dying autistic children in Paris today are one quite small group of homeless children among the very, very many homeless children in the world.

For the autistic children in the new hospice, their special case has brought relief. What relief might be available for all those numberless other homeless children who, however unlike the dying autistic children, nonetheless share with them the condition of no longer having – if they ever had – a regular, fixed place to live?

Experience has taught many philosophers to be reasonably sceptical that any such relief in substantive ways can in fact sufficiently address the ethically unjustifiable conditions of many homeless children in the world today. For not even

the enormous resources of the United Nations Millenium Fund nor the colossal wealth and generosity of a Bill Gates can address such matters satisfactorily. So what could philosophers do?

Still, much good has been done, and continues to be done, for the very poor in the world, for the truly destitute. And among the truly destitute, whether in the flimsy shelters of the several million refugees in the Syrian deserts, or in the rag-tag campsites of the several million displaced persons in the Eastern Congo jungles, or in the malodorous, cramped, and insalubrious squats of Paris and its suburban slums.

Evidently, most philosophers are poorly placed to help in that never-ending and necessary task of trying to coming to the assistance of the truly destitute, especially of innocent destitute children. And yet some philosophers may also be among the very best placed not so much to offer their help to these children, but, counter intuitively, perhaps to receive help from them.

For, by the extraordinarily good fortune of being able to exercise their reflective and self-critical profession in the abundance and peace of plenty, all the while learning like Socrates how to die, who more than philosophers might have the material situation, the education, and the leisure, to confront thoughtfully such a vastness of innocent suffering?

Specifically, however, with regard to alleviating even an infinitesimal part of such a vastness of innocent human suffering, just what exactly could philosophers do? I would like to suggest here that some philosophers might engage themselves sympathetically but critically in the investigation of the rather speculative idea of ethical innovation.

That is, some philosophers might try to understand and then to communicate to others just what the nature, the need for, and the genuine difficulties with both the idea and the practice of ethical innovation might look like. They might try to imagine and then test against their own diverse experiences whether some central ethical surmises like the invention of new virtues finally make good enough critical sense to continue to speculate publicly on the disparate ideas of a new ethics for our new times.

Further, some philosophers might even wish to explore aspects only of what I will now be able merely to suggest by way of analogy with both Eastern and Western conceptions of mindfulness. In other words, by choosing to engage themselves reflectively with the idea of ethical innovation, some philosophers today may choose to inquire seriously into not just the conceptual but also the practical possibilities of effecting genuine ethical changes.

They may choose, if not philanthropically at least philosophically, to try to address efficaciously the vastness of the innocent suffering of truly destitute, children. They may even choose, if not to aid such children any more than they already may be doing, to let themselves be aided by the sufferings of the truly destitute.

That is, in perhaps some of the artful ways that several architects have investigated artistic innovation by trying to invent a novel type of garden both green and white, some philosophers may try to invent a new moral and ethical virtue, something both dark and light incorporating both moral obligation and ethical responsiveness to value.

In other words, some philosophers today may choose to put to the tests of reason the still rather speculative idea of ethical innovation. They might do so, for example, by trying to invent a new virtue that would directly address if not substantively alleviate the immensities of children's sufferings.

Perhaps such an ethically innovative virtue could even find some of its conceptual inspiration in not just an aesthetic but in an ethical European and East Asian cooperation, in, say, both an Augustinian mindfulness of the heart's restlessness (*cor inquietum*) and a Buddhist mindfulness of self-power and other-power (*jiriki* and *tarikī*)?

Far differently than an aesthetic innovation like a children's hospice garden of motionless green and white, however, an ethical innovation would theoretically and practically attempt to harmonize several incessant movements. For, figuratively speaking, the heart's contractions and its dilations, its systoles and diastoles (like the Augustinian restlessness) would seem to

be in un-reconciled tension with the stillness of a certain wisdom and a certain compassion (like the traditional companions of the Amida Buddha).

Unlike then an aesthetic innovation, an ethical innovation might well need to reconcile and to incorporate both serene internal dispositions and energetic external agencies into any ongoing and consequent preoccupation with the most basic good of others.

§3. Ambiguities

The general idea of “ethical innovation” is ambiguous. For we may use this expression to mean, as in common English parlance, *to introduce something new*, say, with respect to established methods or ideas in ethics. Or we may just as well use this expression to mean, as also in common English parlance, *to make changes*, say, with respect to established methods or ideas in ethics.³

“Making changes” entails that something was there in the first place. But “introducing something new” may imply, but does not entail, that something was there in the first place. Clearly, then, these senses of the expression “innovation” are different. Hence, the expressions “innovation” and accordingly “ethical innovation” is open to more than one interpretation; they are ambiguous.

On the bases, however, of such examples as the first appearance of “*responsabilité*” in eighteenth-century French dictionaries,⁴ we may rather simply disambiguate the notion of ethical innovation. Thus, the example shows that “ethical innovation”

³ Wherever I write, as here, “common English parlance,” I mean to refer to the respective entries in the one-volume, relatively new, and newly conceived, *Oxford Dictionary of English* [ODE], 2nd edition (Oxford: OUP, 2003), and not to the twenty-volume *Oxford English Dictionary* or *OED*, which nonetheless remains indispensable. The first edition of the *ODE*, compiled for the first time on the bases of the use and frequency of the millions of words now on line in the Oxford English Corpus, appeared in 1998 only.

⁴ T. Imamichi, *An Introduction to Eco-Ethica*, tr. J. Wakabayashi (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2009), pp. 42-45.

mainly refers not to making changes in something already established in ethics, but to introducing something new into ethics.

Are we then to understand that, in suggesting that some thoughtful persons critically examine the idea of ethical innovation, we are suggesting that these persons introduce something new into what the dictionaries call “the methods and ideas of ethics?”

Not exactly. For when we consider further the key example of “*responsabilité*,” I think we can exclude the suggestion that ethical innovation involves introducing something new into *the methods* of ethics. As for the idea of ethical innovation comprising the notion of introducing something new into *the ideas of ethics*, I think we can agree. But we can do so only by specifying that these ideas are precisely those that concern ethical virtue in particular.

May we then conclude that the general expression “ethical innovation” denotes the fact that, historically speaking, some thoughtful persons have introduced something new into ideas if not methods about ethics in the sense of having proposed novel ethical virtues?

Not quite. For a second ambiguity arises here as to whether the novelty of ethical innovation mainly concerns introducing *new virtues*, or introducing *new ideas* about virtues.

Returning to the example of “*responsabilité*” a last time, however, enables us to resolve this further ambiguity. For the main point of citing the example is not to illustrate the novelty of ideas about virtue, but the newness itself of a particular virtue.

Accordingly, perhaps we may now say that the doubly ambiguous idea of ethical innovation comes mainly to the idea of introducing something new. What is new is the suggestion of the philosophical invention of novel virtues for our novel times.

That is, under the heading of ethical innovation, some would propose for philosophical articulation, and perhaps even for subsequent practical adoption, novel virtues and not just novel ideas about virtue for our novel times today in the now globalized conjuncture of both information and communication technologies.

§4. Virtue

With these clarifications regarding the notion of ethical innovation as a project of introducing new virtues, we need now to specify just what we are to understand here by “virtue.” In particular, we need briefly to assemble several reminders as to several traditional understandings of this expression.

Common English parlance today opposes the word “virtue” when used alone to “virtue” when used in such noun phrases as “a virtue.” In the first case, the word “virtue” functions as what linguists call “a mass noun,” whereas in the second case “virtue” functions as “a count noun.”

This syntactic and not just semantic distinction is important, and especially so for philosophers. For native speakers use a mass noun grammatically to denote the semantic properties of continuous, non-separable qualities. By contrast, native speakers use a count noun to denote something very different, namely the semantic properties of countable, separable qualities.⁵

We are mainly interested here in understanding the mass noun “virtue” rather than the count noun in such expressions as “a virtue.” Thus, in common English parlance today, the mass noun “virtue” denotes mainly any kind of human behaviour that, continuously, exhibits a morally good quality. Such qualities, we may say here, are those that most societies and communities generally consider as highly desirable for persons to exhibit.

Now, in broad philosophical usage, the word “virtue” is used more precisely to denote mainly some continuous and admirable trait of character that renders a person better, whether morally or intellectually or both.⁶ Historically, of course, philosophical conceptions of virtue have varied greatly, from Greek Platonic, Aristotelian, and Stoic views, through Medieval Augustinian, Thomist, and Ockhamist views, into such modern views as those of Hume (naturalism), Kant (deontology), and Mill (utilitarianism).

⁵ D. Crystal, *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*, 5th ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p. 284.

⁶ See, for example, S. Blackburn’s standard discussion in his *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: OUP, 2005), p. 383.

To illustrate some specific modern views only, consider a helpful and recent summary account. Thus, “[f]or Hume, a virtue is a trait of character with the power of producing love or esteem of others, or pride in oneself, by being ‘useful or agreeable’ to its possessors and those affected by them. In Kant, virtue is purely a trait that can act as a handmaiden to the doing of duty, having no independent ethical value, and in utilitarianism, virtues are traits of character that further pursuit of the general happiness.”⁷

Between these common uses of “virtue” and philosophical uses both broad and specific, perhaps we can identify some useful middle ground. Thus, we might first try to distinguish a narrow philosophical usage of this crucial term as standing somewhere between both the broad and the specific philosophical uses above. And then we might proceed to contrast this narrow philosophical usage with the common uses in ordinary, everyday parlance.

Such an approach would be advantageous. For it might avoid prematurely adopting for further reflection the perhaps overly narrow and Eurocentric, Greek Aristotelian or Christian-Thomist usages, or possibly the overly broad and merely English-language, commonsensical uses. After all, to mention just one of the numerous major non-European philosophical thinkers, Confucius too had important philosophical things to say about both virtue and virtues. And of course he lived outside Europe and wrote in Chinese.

§5. Why New Virtues

If we agree to understand ethical innovation and a notion of virtue in the terms I have been suggesting so far, we now have to ask just what it could be about our situation today, at least in Europe, that might ever reasonably prompt someone to propose the idea of ethical innovation as the invention of new virtues. Why new virtues now?

⁷ *Ibid.*

The need to invent new virtues is not evident. For a plethora of virtues is already on hand. And even if we set aside political, diplomatic, scientific, economic, national, social, communitarian, theological, and still other kinds of virtue, we still have a great variety of traditional philosophical virtues before us on the table.

Some of these, as Aristotle insisted, are intellectual; others are moral. Still others, some of our contemporaries argue, seem to involve something of both, for example, the so-called doxastic virtues of intellectual impartiality and intellectual courage.

What is it then about our situation in Europe today that would seem to those interested in ethics and moral philosophy generally to require inventing some novel kinds of virtuous behaviour? What might require for the first time the practice of novel virtuous actions on the part of at least some reflective persons in Europe today that neither the myriad practices of wisdom, prudence, courage, temperance, justice, benevolence, generosity, patience, kindness, and so on, can adequately respond to?

We come here to the difficult matter of just how satisfactorily many salient and generally well-received descriptions of our present situation in Europe actually are. No strictly historical and empirical description as such, of course, can be complete. And most descriptions of the contemporary European situation today do not pretend to offer some kind of encompassing historical and empirical description.

Nonetheless, not a few quite detailed empirical descriptions of the European situation today have emerged. And certainly more are still required.

Many of these descriptions, such as the descriptions of contemporary developments in the sciences and technology as well as in various cultures and artworlds, have proven to be not just persuasive but genuinely instructive.

Think, for example, of some of the contributions that the various institutions of the EU have made to our current understandings of the ongoing challenges that continue to challenge European societies.

And recall the extraordinary clarifications about the emerging nature of the new Europe that arose from the EU's two-year constituent assembly from 2002 to 2004 and that resulted in the draft of a first European Constitution signed by the leaders of all the EU's member states of the time. It is true that, after ratification by many EU member states, France and the Netherlands rejected the draft constitution in referenda. But many of the clarifications that constitution brought about were later integrated into the EU's December 2009 Lisbon Treaty.

Still, these readings of the actual European situation today in general and the cluster of ideas about ethical matters and European values in particular rely mainly on various and often competing reflections on the essential roles of science and technology.

As I mentioned above, these essential elements in both the European situation and the world today may not unfairly be parsed as the technological conjuncture. This fusion of science and technology may be further understood in largely historical and empirical terms as the globalized concatenation, the continually expanding *Vernetzung*, of the apparently endlessly developing information and communication technologies.

The point of much of that diverse reflection on the technological conjuncture so far is that, over the last generation or so, the invention, the development, and then the globalization of such information and communication technologies as the internet, the web, the grid, the social media, and so on, have ethically transformed our previous situation in the world.

For a transformative ethical change has followed from the completely novel capacities of thoughtful and connected persons today to know just what possibilities and challenges, positive and negative, are facing people all over the world in something very close to real time.

As the economist, politician, and former head of the European Union, Jacques Delors has written, "*La mondialisation, produit dérivé des nouvelles techniques de l'information et de la communication qui font de l'étranger des antipodes un voisin*

de palier, enrichit certes et heureusement la planète, mais dans l'iniquité et l'injustice. Elle est ambivalente."⁸

Among such reflective and connected persons are most philosophers. And many such persons have realised to their dismay that they may no longer have any cogent rational excuses for remaining ignorant of the mortal situations in which so very many people in Europe and in the world generally, including numberless innocent children, find themselves today.

Unlike yesterday, today reason requires, among other things like philanthropy, thoughtful, sustained philosophical confrontation with the heretofore unknown and unimagined extent of innocent suffering throughout the world. And among the most salient instances of such vast innocent suffering is the situation of utterly destitute homeless children not just in Africa or Asia or Latin America but practically on my Paris doorstep in Europe today.

With reliable knowledge of such a vastness of innocent suffering now immediately at hand, what if anything ought philosophers to do? What can they do?

Perhaps among many other things they ought to and can engage with is whether addressing not unsatisfactorily such a vastness of innocent suffering today requires ethical innovation, indeed the invention of new virtues. For, just as in eighteenth-century France, so too in twenty-first century Europe, no specific ethical virtues would seem to be available for addressing such an unprecedented situation that involves so many innocent and truly destitute people.

What makes our situation unprecedented, I believe, is two-fold. First, we now have completely new possibilities, as philosophers and not just as philanthropists, to see, to hear, and to know in almost real time the mortal plight of so many such persons. And, second, we now can recognize our completely new incapacities, if not as philanthropists then certainly as philosophers, for ignoring that plight any longer.

⁸ *Le Figaro*, October 25, 2006.

But the conception and the practice of no traditional virtues whatsoever has ever entailed embodying such inescapable and tragic knowledge as our knowledge today of the vastness of innocent human suffering today and our incapacities to alleviate it substantively. What then would a novel ethical virtue that might embody such tragic knowledge look like?

§6. A Novel Ethical Virtue?

In an earlier essay in this selection I have initially tried to describe such a virtue rather figuratively as “heartfulness.” Rehearsing again many of the details already described there is not necessary. Yet perhaps something like “heartfulness” would need some further description.

But however we might continue to detail that earlier quite figurative description – it may be worthwhile re-reading that description here – surely we must object. For isn’t all of this elaborate figurative talk just too much? Too, too much?

After all, any properly philosophical understanding of virtue, whether old or new, within a genuinely philosophically ethical framework remains, and must remain, a suitably modest and humane affair. And where is the modesty here? Where is the humanity?

For who among the average everyday run of any one of us could ever responsibly consider shouldering even an infinitesimal part of the task of trying to alleviate substantially the vastness of innocent human suffering?

Surely no respectable moral account could ever be built on the assumption that most of us are capable of habitually acting virtuously in the way that heroes or saints do. Philosophers, not to speak of our neighbours, are just not like that; they are not like that at all. And yet acting like heroes or like saints seems to be very much what acting virtuously as acting “heartfully” is supposed to be.

In short, ethical innovation in the sense of introducing some novel ethical virtue like heartfulness looks far too little like

anything human and far too much like something supererogatory, something more than even God commands.

For on at least the description here, heartfulness looks like something poetic, transcendental, supernatural, even mystical, rather than something prosaic, immanent, natural, and sustainable in some ordinary, everyday, run-of-the-mill, human way.⁹

That is, “heartfulness” as some supposedly novel virtue would seem to disqualify itself almost immediately from any sustained philosophical consideration. In short, “heartfulness” seems to be, as most eminently sane everyday philosophical characters would say, “just too damn idealistic.”

On reflection, however, even those who rightly advocate the importance of any respectable comprehensive moral account today that would reserve an important place (if not the most important place) for ethical virtue recognize that not all ethical situations are ordinary and not all call for everyday ethical capacities. Some ethical situations are exceptional.

That is, some ethical situations call for responses that lie beyond the ordinary capacities that the practices of traditional virtues like, for example, benevolence require, and that many ordinary people are able to take up as second nature. But how to describe such situations? We need a quite particular example of such an extraordinary ethical situation and an extraordinary ethical response.

§7. An Extraordinary Situation

Consider then a scene from Nicholas Monsarrat’s novel, *The Cruel Sea*. In order to neutralise an enemy submarine, the thoughtful and good captain of a destroyer must make a deliberate decision to launch depth charges. When exploding, how-

⁹ For these kinds of modest expectations of any ethical theory today see, for example, D. Wiggins, *Twelve Lectures on the Philosophy of Morality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2006). For critical comments, especially on Wiggins’s idea that some moral situations surpass our modest expectations of any ethical theory and nonetheless call for a reflective moral response, see the review by T. Nagel, “Good Value,” *TLS*, October 20, 2006.

ever, the charges will kill some men in the water from a torpedoed cargo ship. After deliberation, he decides to launch the depth charges.

And here is a rather recent philosophical commentary. The commentary takes the form of a question in which one person, perhaps someone we might imagine like ourselves inquiring into the nature of ethical innovation (a friend of the captain?), goes on to give urgent advice to another person (the captain?). Perhaps we may even take this person as someone whose situation has evoked the necessity for the exercise of some novel ethical virtue like “heartfulness.”

“When someone... points to some emergency so great that a beneficent agent will have to do something simply terrible in order to avert a disaster of almost unthinkable proportions,” the question goes, “is the person who offers this advice really in the business of telling the beneficent person what it is right for him to do?”

“Surely not...”, the answer goes. “He is trying to show the beneficent person that that awful act is what he has to do, not what he ‘morally ought’ to do.”

And then the philosopher adds a contrast to one of the most important contemporary ethical theories today. “This is a new discipline and a new dialectic,” he writes, “lying altogether outside the remit of ‘deontology’ as that which was traditionally conceived... Questions of right and wrong, of obligation, or of acts that the doing of which would be morally praiseworthy because they were done from a sense of duty... all these things will long since have gone out of the window.”¹⁰

Now, the “new discipline” and “new dialectic” this philosopher has in mind here is certainly not ethics as traditionally understood. Nonetheless, the main point of his remarks may help us reply to the objection of “supererogation” to a conception of a novel ethical virtue like “heartfulness.”

The point is that, however right moral philosophers are to insist on any ethics having to be properly modest and humane,

¹⁰ Nagel cites this passage from Wiggins on p. 6 of his review above.

such philosophers must keep open their ethical reflection before the occurrence of exceptional situations that require a more than modest and more than ordinarily humane ethical response. Moreover, they need to accept the fact that making such a necessary response to certain exceptional situations may not be possible for most people who must rely most of the time on no other capacities than their own self-powers.

And yet, even ordinary people like naval captains at war do succeed sometimes in addressing such exceptional ethical situations not unsatisfactorily wherever their exceptional capacities might come from.

Similarly, I would argue that the vastness of innocent suffering is truly an exceptional ethical situation. Perhaps we may call such a vastness “an ethical singularity,” some “point in spacetime at which the curvature of space becomes infinite.”¹¹ And any attempt to try to reduce substantially such an ethical singularity, such a vastness of innocent suffering, requires a person to have more than ordinary ethical resources, resources that might even appear to some as immodest, supererogatory, and, in some almost literal senses, inhumane.

Nonetheless, twentieth century history, the history of probably the most tragic of centuries, has repeatedly demonstrated not just the frequency of extraordinary ethical situations, but the manifold of extraordinary ethical resources some persons sometimes have at their disposal.¹²

And some of these manifold ethical resources might even sometimes include a capacity for ethical innovation, for imagining and then for practicing some virtuous activities that never

¹¹ S. Hawking, *The Universe in a Nutshell* (New York: Bantam, 2001), p. 207.

¹² See, for example, two distinguished works that helpfully complement one another, N. Ferguson, *The War of the World: Twentieth-Century Conflict and the Descent of the West* (New York: Penguin, 2006), reviewed by P. Kennedy, “The Worst of Times?” *The New York Review of Books*, November 2, 2006, and T. Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Heinemann, 2005), reviewed by C. King, “States of Amnesia,” *TLS*, October 21, 2005, and A. Ryan, “After the Fall,” *The New York Review of Books*, November 5, 2005.

existed before, perhaps even for acting on the bases of some novel ethical virtue like heartfulness.

§8. Consolation

After trying to deal reasonably with at least one major objection to the very idea of such a novel ethical virtue as heartfulness, perhaps we may now try to fill out, if only still figuratively, still more of what heartfulness might look like.

So let us image that having been fully emptied, the heart of this ethically virtuous person, the heartfelt person, has become full of nothingness in such a way as to be able to share in the everything of others. Any consolation she may receive not from her own power but from some other power will enable her to live out her life in a continual efficacious capacity for sharing. This was unexpected.

Even more unexpectedly, she can no longer go back to her previous state. Heartfulness is not reversible. Heartfulness allows no moral back-sliding. For the dynamic vastness of innocent human suffering can never stop filling her heart, can never again leave any place at all for herself. She can no longer live any other way than “heartfully”.

And whenever accepted by others, her virtuous and efficacious capacity for sharing their being will help conditions to be established – how she cannot know – for their own eventual experience of the negative sublime. This experience is the active and not just a passive realisation of their own emptiness, a nothingness that becomes a readiness for perhaps eventually receiving some substantive consolation in their own right.

Her own ethically virtuous path has definitively intersected with the paths of other persons where something keeps eventualising. It has intersected with their paths in something like the ways in which a green and white space keeps emerging where white and only partly transparent masses along two streets keep intersecting in a children’s hospice garden.

Envoi

The hospice garden I evoked at the outset of these meditative and speculative reflections opens out in undulating triangular form from the slightly opened intersection of two large, oblique, white masses, two entirely separate buildings each sited along one of the two streets enclosing the space.

Enormous glass façades first borrow the white light outside. And then they rainbow the light ceaselessly with the changing hours of the day and the shifting inclinations of the seasons.

The pale skin of the two buildings brings the now iridescent light into and through each of the bodies of the hospital buildings, and then finally to rest among the audibly moving waters and still stones of the luminous green garden at their massive juxtapositions.

There, in irregular, wavy lines, superposed at slightly shifting angles and rippling lustrously through the winded garden greens, the sharply polarised light of the days and the seasons gradually descends at dusk and, just before night, goes once again white.

The artfulness of the East-Asian, Japanese architect and his European, French associates has resulted in neither a traditional Japanese borrowed landscape garden, a *shakkei* garden, nor a traditional French medicinal garden, a *jardin des plantes*, nor even some mixture of the two. Rather, the result is genuinely innovative; the garden is simply novel. Nothing quite like it has been seen before.

Perhaps this garden, a work of both natural and artificial invention flowing from a rare harmony of both mindfulness and of what we might still critically call heartfulness, may prove to be a source of wisdom and compassion for those mortally afflicted persons for whom it has been reverently imagined, for the dying autistic children looking upon it wordlessly from their bedside windows.

May such a garden perhaps also help some philosophers imagine the possibility of ethical innovation, even of a some novel ethical virtue like heartfulness, that – who really knows? – might enable someone else to alleviate just some small part of the unthinkable vastness of innocent suffering?