

Moral Phenomenology and a Moral Ontology of the Human Person

by

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Moral phenomenology and moral ontology¹

Moral phenomenology is loosely defined as ‘the what-it-is-like features of concrete moral experience’ (Horgan & Timmons 2005) or the first-person account of the experiential aspect of our moral life (Kriegel 2008).² Champions of this emerging field, Terry Horgan and Mark Simmons, claim that analytic moral philosophy has hardly been concerned with moral phenomenology, despite the fact that both normative and meta-ethical theory regularly appeal to first-personal moral experience. Generally supported by a number of philosophers (Kriegel 2008; Drummond 2008; Annas 2008), they believe that the pursuit of moral phenomenology should at least form a partial basis for moral theorizing. Horgan and Simmons work (2008) implies four basic criteria that moral phenomenology must meet if it is to be a viable field of study that can make a worthwhile contribution to moral philosophy: it must be a) about a *unified subject matter*, namely moral experience b) *wide* in the sense that it deals with moral experiences that are broadly shared c) *independent* in that it is sufficiently removed from moral theories or pre-formed moral judgements and d) *robust* in the sense that it can help to distinguish between competing moral theories. There is some scepticism, however, as to whether or not these criteria can be met. Walter Sinnott-Armstrong (2008) claims that the experiences of moral emotions like anger, disgust contempt or distrust are altogether dissimilar. He wonders what anger at a violent robbery could have in common with the disgust of seeing someone spit on their father’s grave? The diversity of moral experience, he insists, is far too great to form a unified field of study, thereby making the pursuit of moral phenomenology too broad to be useful. Michael Gill’s objection (2008, 2009) is directed not at the purported subject of moral phenomenology but at the individual pursuing it. He contends that any moral phenomenology, based as it is on individual experience, is so theory-laden with pre-formed moral views that it cannot provide an objective way of adjudicating between incompatible moral experiences or, by extension, the theories that they inform. Though these are formidable objections, I do not believe they have received an adequate rebuttal³ and so the viability of moral phenomenology remains in doubt.

¹ My thanks to Prof Ullrich Melle for his valued advice on an earlier version of this paper. I would also like to thank my blind reviewers for their extremely useful comments which have helped to much improve the text.

² In 2008, this journal dedicated an issue to the emerging theme of moral phenomenology. This paper is largely motivated by the works published there.

³ Horgan and Simmons (2008) go some way to defending moral phenomenology against these criticisms, though their replies are rather general and they themselves admit that a good deal more work is required to make a more substantive rebuttal.

My proposal in this paper is that the four basic criteria of a successful moral phenomenology can be met by elucidating the very foundations of moral experience, that is, a *moral ontology of the human person*. Let me explain. An ontology of the human person refers to the theoretic elucidation of the essential characteristics of that entity. Assuming that there is something it is to be a human person, we can at the very least say there is a common ontology running through all human experience, or else it wouldn't be human experience. In order to determine what is minimally involved in moral experience, for the purposes of moral phenomenology, those aspects of the human person's ontology most relevant to morality must be identified. As we shall see, key to a moral ontology of the human person is an understanding of the structure of moral action, that is, how the agent experiences *phronēsis*. My greatest ambition in this paper is to provide a convincing outline of some of the key elements of a moral ontology that could serve as the foundations of moral phenomenology. However, since there are those who may disagree with the content of my analysis, I will be satisfied if my only achievement is to communicate what such a moral ontology might look like and how one might go about achieving it. My attempt to elucidate a moral ontology of the human person is based on the work of Robert Sokolowski. Though I shall regularly refer to his 1985 text *Moral Action: A Phenomenological Investigation*, where he investigates the ontology of human action from a moral point of view, I will be more concerned with his recent work *Phenomenology of the Human Person*.⁴ Using the phenomenological method,⁵ in this 2008 text Sokolowski is primarily concerned with providing a description of the human person that illustrates its essential nature as a rational animal or, to use his preferred term, an *agent of truth*. Although his main focus in this treatise is not with moral philosophy, I contend that his understanding of the human person lays the basis for a moral ontology. The next part of this paper is dedicated to briefly outlining some key aspects of Sokolowski's account of the human person. Following this, I expand on the idea of moral ontology, identifying some of its core ideas to be those of well-being, virtue, freedom, responsibility and *phronēsis*. Each of these concepts is explored in its own turn with regard to Sokolowski's understanding of the human person. Finally, I explain how my Sokolowski-based

⁴ Henceforth, all references to this work will be made in the main body of the text with the page number only.

⁵ Sokolowski generally defines the phenomenological method as the attempt to theorise the human conversation and all that shows up within it (3). This is a rather idiosyncratic definition, yet it does not contradict the more generic understanding of phenomenology as the description of first-person experience. The reason behind Sokolowski's novel definition, which centres on the idea of the "human conversation", is that he wishes to illustrate the public nature of phenomena and the primacy of language in constituting thought. See Section II below.

moral ontology demonstrates that moral experience is unified in important ways and that moral phenomenology can be sufficiently wide, independent and robust.

Sokolowski on the agent of truth

According to Sokolowski, the *essence* or definition of the human person is ‘the agent of truth’, a term indicating that the human person is constituted by reason (1). While he holds that reason and speech are philosophically distinguishable, he does not think that they are substantially separable (39). Additionally, he contends that the paradigmatic case of reason or thinking takes place in the medium of words (39). As such, he hopes to understand what the human person is by investigating how reason is displayed in speech. By attempting to locate reason in the human conversation, that is, in the publicity of rational dialogue between agents of truth, Sokolowski sees himself as departing from the tendencies of the idealist tradition which seeks human rationality in the mind of the individual subject. He argues that, at first and normally, reason is not established privately between an individual person and the world. On such a view, he contends that the possibility of communication and the establishment of a communal world would be impossible (62). Avoiding this classic egocentric predicament, where the isolated thinker cannot move beyond his representations of the world to engage in the actual world with others (69), he suggests that reason is at first a public achievement and that private thinking is but the internalisation of rational discourse that each individual has learned through participation in the human conversation (62). On this view then it is the intersubjective realm of conversation and not that of the solitary ego that is the ‘default condition’ (217) of the human person.⁶ In this section, I explore how Sokolowski conceives of the human person as essentially an agent of truth. First, I explain his understanding of syntax and semantics, drawing particular attention to his notion that the agent of truth is expressed in syntax. My second task is to explore his conception of veracity with a view to further specifying his comprehension of rationality.

⁶ From a Husserlian perspective, Sokolowski’s account of the default condition is remarkable. While Sokolowski agrees with Husserl that syntax is not innate but instead established through our interaction as infants with the world of objects, he thinks Husserl’s description is inadequate for it gives the impression that the infant achieves syntax on its own. Though I cannot present his account here, what Sokolowski wishes to highlight is that syntax is established through interlocutors in that it is something a speaker does for a listener. In other words, he believes that syntax originates in the medium of words whereby mature agents manifest the world to an infant through predication, allowing the latter to internalise the structures of language and so establish reason (58-61).

Syntax and Semantics

As Sokolowski is sure to make clear at the outset, he takes syntax, the term at the heart of his investigation, to be equivalent to Husserl's more technical term "categoriality" (1). Categorialities, for Husserl, are essentially those forms of thinking that allow things not just to show up for us but to show up for us *in a certain way*. As Sokolowski would put it, it is only for an agent of truth that a table can be manifested "as" a table which can be understood "as" old or brown or big, etc. Categoriality or syntax, in other words, is that which constitutes human understanding and is therefore responsible for the entire manifold of possible perspectives from which the world is intelligible to us. Sokolowski believes that the human person, as an agent of truth, is made most tangible in its use of syntax. His argument runs as follows: if syntax establishes speech and if speech is the paradigmatic expression of reason, then the agent of truth is manifested most clearly through its use of syntax (39). But what, more precisely, is syntax for Sokolowski and how does he think it establishes speech? He conceives of syntax as grammatical articulation that allows for the possibility of speech by giving form and order to our vocabulary, which would otherwise be a string of ideas equivalent to baby-talk or what is called protolanguage (37). Once syntax is installed, he suggests, the sequences of ideas characteristic of protolanguage are transformed into stacked thoughts. To expand on this, for Sokolowski, syntax constitutes thinking and speaking in a manner analogous to Chinese boxes where one thought is embedded in a whole array of larger thoughts (37). On his view, it is words like *that*, *will*, *after*, *unless* and *the* – which have no meaning outside their grammatical functions – that allow thoughts or phrases like "I know that I will go home after work unless you have the phone working" to be stacked or related in such a way that they make a single coherent proposition. He points out that this stacking structure goes right down to the basic unit of language, predication, which is defined as saying something about something (48).

Sokolowski recognises, of course, that we do not find human syntax without semantics, that is, the content of our speech to which syntax gives form (81). Human reason, he insists, is at work in this domain also and he considers its primary function to be to bring forth the *intelligibility* of things. Although Sokolowski asserts that it is our categoriality or powers of syntax which allow things to show up for us "as" something, he affirms that it is the way in which reason engages with reality that determines precisely *how* the things are made intelligible (105). For Sokolowski, reality is made intelligible to us through the interplay of accidents,

properties and essences (128) and all human speech is an attempt to highlight one or the other (117). Accidents, he insists, are most commonly targeted in speech for they reveal how things have contingently actualised their possibilities at a particular time (118). Properties, for Sokolowski, are those potentialities or powers in entities that are accidentally actualised by those very entities (119). The essence or definition of a thing, he claims, underlies both the properties and the accidents such that the properties ‘flow from it’ (106). Put differently, he avers that all properties are fixed to an essence and the latter explains or makes sense of the former. Unlike accidents and properties, he insists that essences cannot be explained but only understood (107). On Sokolowski’s account, all properties of the human person are explicable by its essence as an agent of truth.⁷ Does this mean that human beings jump in and out of personhood, depending on whether or not they are engaging their reason or truthful agency? Sokolowski’s view does not entail this implausibility for he believes that essences are bound up with the end or perfection of things (186). For instance, he thinks that we can make particular statements about an unripe fruit only if we have some idea of the fruit in its perfection as ripe. An unconscious person or someone who has damaged their capacity for reasoning does not cease to be a person, by Sokolowski’s definition, for their nature is specified by what they are at their best.⁸

Veracity

Further determining Sokolowski’s notion of reason involves explaining what he means by *veracity*. Veracity, he says, is a synonym for reason and he defines it as the human desire for truth (20). What is special about this term, for him, is that it brings out the aspect of desire that is present in rationality while implying that there is a moral goodness to satisfying that desire by achieving truth (20). Furthermore, he believes that it expands the realm of thinking and truth to all forms of understanding, that is, beyond the term “rationality” which seems to limit thinking to the logic of calculation and inference (1, 21). Veracity, Sokolowski hastens to point out, is not a virtue or property of the human person (20) but is the motivating force behind our attempt to

⁷ To take an example, for Sokolowski, smiling, laughing and smirking are all accidental ways in which the human property or capacity of risibility can be actualised. Yet, he holds that risibility or any other property of the human person is ultimately explicable by its essence.

⁸ James Hart (2010) interestingly points out that what Sokolowski refers to as the default condition has an element of contingency about it as some people, such as feral children or the mentally handicapped, may never be in a position to properly inhabit this default condition. Importantly, however, such individuals are not the less persons for this misfortune since Sokolowski would define them as persons, like all things, by what they are at their best.

make the world intelligible in all our speech and action (21). He believes that it constitutes our essence such that all ways of being both truthful and untruthful are expressions of it (20). To explain this, he proposes that truthfulness expresses the essence of the person in its perfect state and as such untruthfulness only makes sense if we conceive it as a poor expression of veracity or privation of truthfulness. Following Bernard Williams (2002), he suggests that there are two central virtues proper to veracity insofar as they make us truthful, namely Sincerity and Accuracy (66). The former virtue he describes as simply telling the truth, resisting any temptation to lie or mislead, while the latter is taking those investigative measures required to discover the truth, resisting temptations to be indolent or biased (66, 91-92). According to Sokolowski, whether or not we successfully exercise these virtues we nevertheless imply to our listeners that we are being both sincere and accurate when we speak (66). That veracity can be expressed well in truthfulness or badly in untruthfulness leads Sokolowski to conceive of veracity reflexively, in the sense that it is a desire that must itself be desired if it is to be developed as it should (93). With this account of veracity in place, I can now proceed to the next part of this paper which is to explore and expand upon the moral content of his phenomenology of the human person.

A moral ontology of the human person

To suggest that I have done justice to Sokolowski's rich phenomenological analysis of the human person would be an overstatement. What I have done is to focus on those elements of his treatise that are most relevant for my interest in moral ontology, sidelining a number of themes that he subjects to in-depth analysis. While Sokolowski's primary concern is not with moral philosophy, he gives no uncertain indications that there is in fact a strong moral content running through his text. In this part of the paper, I explore his phenomenology with a view to establishing the core elements of a moral ontology of the human person. In other words, I am seeking those features of the human person's essence that run through moral experience and make it distinct as moral. This will prove to be a highly interpretive enterprise, requiring as it does a creative construction of the kind of moral ontology implicit in Sokolowski's understanding of the human person. In addition to the interpretive side of my account there will also be a critical dimension, one that is employed whenever it is necessary to go beyond Sokolowski's text. On such occasions, the goal is never to undermine Sokolowski but rather to

add to his account with an eye for improvement. Sokolowski professes himself to be heavily influenced by Aristotle (7) and so it should come as no surprise that the kind of moral ontology that I attempt to construct on the basis of Sokolowski's thought is roughly Aristotelian in kind. The five primary ideas which, I hope to show, go some way to establishing a moral ontology of the human person based on Sokolowski's phenomenology are as follow: well-being, virtue, freedom, responsibility and the practical syntax binding these notions together in the process of acting well, *phronēsis*.

Well-being and the Desire for Truth

The idea of well-being has been variously defined throughout the history of moral philosophy. In *Moral Action*, Sokolowski briefly indicates his endorsement of Aristotle's conception of well-being (1985: 116), defined by the latter as a 'first principle' of human nature in the sense that all human action aims at what an individual person perceives to be his own good at a given time (1984: 1102a1-3). But where do we find this idea in Sokolowski's phenomenology of the agent of truth? In a brief comment, we find him making a point that is similar to Aristotle's function argument: 'We can be happy as human beings only by cultivating our veracity into truthfulness' (21). That is to say, like Aristotle, Sokolowski believes that once we define the essence of the human being or person we can identify well-being or happiness as the well-functioning of that essence. It is implicit in Sokolowski's account then that the end or perfection of the human person is to be truthful and that success in this is required to achieve well-being.⁹ Stated differently, well-being is involved in veracity in such a way that the closer one comes to satisfying the desire for truth the more perfectly one will fulfil the desire for well-being.

Sokolowski is not very specific about what he means by "desire" in talking about the desire for truth. In an effort to explain this, let us distinguish between what he refers to as wanting and wishing. Wanting has to do with voluntary or unthinking acts, as in when I feel chilly and then just put on my jumper without any kind of deliberation or distinction between alternative possibilities. Wanting, claims Sokolowski, is simply conscious desire whereas

⁹ Note that I am not equating well-being with what Aristotle refers to as blessedness. To achieve the fullest state of well-being, Aristotle believes that man needs not only to be virtuous but also to possess a host of external goods such as financial security, friendship, social standing, etc. However, such things are largely out of the human person's control. What is central to the well-being of the human person is his virtue or, on Sokolowski's account, the proper expressions of veracity.

wishing is desire that is peculiarly human insofar as it is rational or thoughtful (239). Although he believes that we can wish for things that are impossible or beyond our control (240), he focuses on those types of wishes that are within our power to actualise through choice. Wishes that we in fact choose to actualise Sokolowski refers to as purposes – my purpose in seeking a tent, for instance, concretises my wish to have shelter (245). What he appears to consider common to the essential desire for truth and purposes (actualised desires) is that they are both attempts to achieve something, to bring to presence something which is absent. The crucial difference, however, seems to lie in the way that he distinguishes ends from purposes. In *Moral Action* (1985:116-7) he correctly points out that well-being, as the *end* of human action, should not be thought of in the same way as we think about purposes for it is not targeted in the same way as we target particular purposes. He explains that well-being is not something beyond our purposes, nor is it located in any specific purpose or set of purposes, but rather it is that which accompanies all our purposes in the sense that we can achieve or fail to achieve it in all that we do. So while the desire for well-being is an end ever present in us, well-being itself is in what we do. Though Sokolowski doesn't make the case, it seems that the same logic applies to understanding the desire for truth as always directing us towards an end that is not beyond our engagement with the world but rather in this very engagement. In short, both the desire for truth and the desire for well-being must be thought of as the active striving towards ultimate ends that are present in all that we do.

However, we must be more specific than this. We must explicitly ask whether our perpetual striving towards well-being constitutes the human essence, along with our desire for truth, or if it is simply a property that flows from our essence? Insofar as it motivates all human action then it would seem to follow that the desire for well-being has as much of a role in constituting the human essence as does the desire for truth. Nevertheless, to make the case more convincing I offer two short arguments. First, if the human person has two desires guiding its action, the desire for truth and the desire for well-being, and if the fulfilment of one desire involves the fulfilment of the other it would appear artificial to separate them in any substantive way. In other words, while it is methodologically possible to distinguish between the desire for truth and the desire for well-being, in practice they always operate together.¹⁰ Second, even if we

¹⁰ One might wonder about the methodological merits of distinguishing between the desire for truth and the desire for well-being if they ultimately collapse into one another in constituting veracity. As I already mentioned in my

tried to relegate the desire for well-being to the status of a property, the desire for truth does not seem capable of explaining the perpetual human drive for well-being in the way that it does properties of the human person. Therefore, by process of elimination, we must understand it as belonging to the essence of the human person. Indeed, by definition, this is what makes it a first principle of human nature. Veracity, then, is more richly understood as the essence of the human person that is constituted by the desire for well-being and the desire for truth. What would it mean to say that the human person desires his own well-being without the use of his faculties to truthfully determine that in which his well-being consists? It would seem to be just as implausible to suggest that the human person desires truth, yet is completely unconcerned for his own well-being in that pursuit. However, as I have already indicated, I consider talk of veracity as involving two separate desires to be a methodological device only. To achieve truth *is* to achieve well-being and it is important to understand that the desire for one *is* the desire for the other.

Virtue and Choice

Typically an account drawing on the Aristotelian idea that the desire for well-being is a first-principle of human nature will also involve a theory of virtue, that is, an understanding of what it is to be the kind of person that achieves well-being. In one sense, Sokolowski's notion of virtue comes quite close to that of Aristotle since he seems to understand this term to denote those dispositions that a person must possess if it is to achieve truth in both speech and action. And, as I have made clear, the achievement of truth is tantamount to the accomplishment of well-being. However, in highlighting Sincerity and Accuracy as the virtues appropriate to the cultivation of veracity, Sokolowski's account of virtue takes a rather unique turn. As those virtues that allow us to realise our essence, it is reasonable to suggest that Sokolowski considers them to be in some way involved in all virtues. Indeed, this is what he seems to be indicating when he comments that 'vices and weaknesses, such as intemperance and cowardice, are...failures in veracity' (95). In other words, he considers a vice such as cowardice to ultimately be a case of insincerity and

outline of veracity, Sokolowski likes this term because it suggests that there is something morally good about fulfilling the desire to be truthful. I submit that the reason why it makes sense to talk about veracity as a moral concept is because human well-being is inextricably bound up with it. When we focus on veracity as the desire for truth we are emphasising the nature of human manifestation. However, when we highlight the desire for well-being we are revealing what makes our truthful manifestations important and morally good.

inaccuracy, with virtue consisting in the reverse. It is my proposal that, on Sokolowski's account, right action is to hit what Aristotle calls the *mean* and that success in this task is equivalent to being sincere and accurate.¹¹ Hitting the mean is to determine that in which moral life consists and as such it must be viewed as an achievement of truth from Sokolowski's point of view.

But if truth is accomplished through Sincerity and Accuracy then it follows that it is by achieving these virtues that moral behaviour is established.¹² That is to say, by achieving truth through Sincerity and Accuracy we determine all other virtues. What this entails is that courage, generosity, temperance, etc. are not virtues in their own right, but names we give to being sincere and accurate in different situations. For instance, when I am honest in a given situation (Sincerity) and I have done everything in my power to understand the state of affairs (Accuracy) it amounts to what we call courage on the battlefield, modesty in the face of praise, charity or justice when engaging with the downtrodden, and so on. The reduction of all virtues to two may seem surprising at first, but if we accept veracity as the definition of the human person then we must also agree that all activities of the human person are specified by how they participate in truth. This does not require that we do away with talk of particular virtues, or what Williams would count as "thick moral concepts" (1985), since they crucially offer us a rich vocabulary for describing our concrete moral engagements. Rather, it is by understanding the nature of veracity that we find a unique expression of what such thick concepts have in common and how they are anchored in the moral ontology of the human person.¹³ Julia Annas (2008: 24) rightly points out that, for Aristotle, we typically do not have virtue or vice in our minds when we act. Put differently, thoughts of virtue or vice are not part of our moral experience in acting well or badly

¹¹ Not wishing to provide a full account of Aristotle's notion of virtue, it will suffice to say that he considers a right or virtuous action to consist in striking the mean between two extremes of vice, specifically excess and deficiency (1984: 1106a24-27).

¹² While Sokolowski identifies Sincerity and Accuracy as the virtuous mean between vices of excess and deficiency, he does not name these vices. I consider hypocrisy to be the excess of Sincerity with dishonesty as its deficiency. Accuracy, on the other hand, is excessive when pedantic and deficient when indiscriminate.

¹³ One blind reviewer has suggested that Williams, from whom we remember Sokolowski adopted the terms Sincerity and Accuracy, might object to my characterization of these virtues here. Williams is suspicious of attempts to 'reduce all ethical considerations to one pattern' (1985:16). Such "thin moral concepts", he believes, are too simplistic to deal with the diversity of moral life for which we need a wide range of "thick concepts", like courage, promise, brutality, etc. that are more concrete. Yet, as I have noted, I do not believe that the way I have interpreted Sincerity and Accuracy in any way reduces the need for thick concepts in moral theorising. The effect of the former is not to explain away the richness of our moral life but rather to help identify the minimal structure running through moral life. It allows, I contend, for a potentially infinite range of complex moral experiences and requires a corresponding vocabulary.

for our ways of thinking and acting are largely habitual. It is, for instance, only when reflecting on the merit of one's thoughts or actions, or in trying to figure out a difficult moral situation that the idea of virtue might become an explicit component of the individual's moral experience. But, following Annas (2008: 21), we tend to think that there must be a what-it-is-likeness to acting well or badly. On the view I have put forward, the experience of being virtuous has to do with the way in which an agent experiences himself in the world when attempting to be sincere and accurate in determining the nature of his situation with regard to achieving his own well-being. Vice, on the other hand, is what it is like to be insincere and/or inaccurate in a given context.

Yet we must ask how is the virtuous or vicious nature of our actions made intelligible to us? To answer this this question, I briefly turn to Sokolowski's text *Moral Action* to outline his notions of *choice* and that which makes choice possible, namely *evaluation*. There are two types of choice, he states, each with its own syntactical structure. One kind of choice is doing something in view of something (1985: 13), like when someone chooses to drive to get to the park, whereas another type of choice has to do with the preferential weighing of distinguished alternatives (1985: 18), like deciding to have fruit instead of cake for desert. As syntactically structured, he believes choice is essentially a rational exercise and only makes up a part of human action which is largely taken up with those voluntary or unthinking acts earlier referred to as wanting (1985: 23). Recalling his contention that syntax or categoriality allows intelligibilities to arise for us ("as" something), we can see that he extends this hypothesis to evaluation claiming that it is precisely because of our reason that things and actions show up to us "as" good or bad. This evaluative form of syntax Sokolowski refers to as *moral categoriality*. It is moral categoriality, he claims, that allows us to understand what would otherwise be a mere material transaction (you pushed me/loaned a large sum to a friend) "as" a moral transaction (you have contempt for me/are quite generous) (1985:55). What these examples help to show is that moral categoriality does not simply allow us to make the crude distinction between good and bad but is responsible for all the richness of moral life in the sense that it allows us to identify all varieties of good (generosity, charity, health, etc.) and bad (contempt, disrespect, cowardice, etc.). Moreover, as Sokolowski notes, moral transactions provide the framework for all moral actions and are structured in the form of identifying 'this performance here and now as good or bad for another and as such as good or bad for me' (1985:151) and from this structure there are an unlimited number of possible permutations (1985:63). To take some simple examples, in running

my political campaign I can recognise bringing my opponent into disrepute (his bad) as improving my chances of election (my good) just as I can see failing to give my children a proper education (their bad) as my being a negligent father (my bad). On this view then, it is only insofar as an agent experiences a distinction between what it perceives as good and bad that it can choose to do the right thing.¹⁴ In other words, if this kind of evaluation was not involved in all moral choice it would be difficult to conceive of moral action in any meaningful way. Now, if moral action consists in identifying that which is best for one's own well-being and choosing it, then success in moral agency is dependent on having interpretations of what is good that are equivalent to what is actually good. And, as I have explained, it is only by being sincere and accurate that there is any hope of properly determining the good.

Freedom as Strong Evaluation

Having established an idea of virtue based on Sokolowski's conception of the human person, I move on to discuss that feature of moral ontology I have referred to as freedom. That this notion is tightly linked to both veracity and responsibility is evident from Sokolowski's somewhat ambiguous claim that '[t]here is an intrinsic connection between the flowering of veracity and the presence of human freedom and responsibility' (93). To help clarify this assertion, I briefly indicate how responsibility is involved with the notion of freedom. I suggest that the human person is *free* when it can be said to make its own choices and it is *responsible* for its own choices insofar as he is free to make them. Evidently, freedom and responsibility are entangled with the notion of *choice*, which I define as that capacity which allows the human person to direct its own life in such a way that he can be said to be free and responsible. My argument in the last section indicates that determining and choosing what is good is the proper cultivation of veracity. As such, we can surmise that Sokolowski believes that our freedom and responsibility are most fully themselves when they are engaged in doing the right thing, while doing the wrong thing involves a failure in realising our freedom and responsibility. The next section elucidates

¹⁴ Following Sokolowski, I would like to avoid the image that tends to be present in traditional philosophy where the agent assesses his action as good and bad in his mind and then makes a choice that he then carries out. Instead, Sokolowski insightfully proposes that evaluation is a much more public affair where my assessment of something as good or bad is going on *while* I am doing it. He gives an example stating that I do not simply see the cake as good and then eat it, but that my evaluation of the cake as good goes on as I am eating it (1985: 58).

how responsibility is involved in right action, but for now I discuss freedom with the help of Charles Taylor.

Sokolowski makes sparse and vague comments about human freedom. Most revealing is his assertion that ‘freedom does not mean arbitrary selection, but adherence to what is best’ (27). To determine the meaning of this contention, I return to his conception of wishing. One important feature of this account, for Sokolowski, is that wishes are normally not active intentions but dispositional desires that reveal who we are (250-251).¹⁵ By this he means, I suggest, that our dispositions to desire certain things in certain ways reveal what we are interested in, how we distinguish between good and bad and ultimately what we hope to get out of life, thereby revealing the nature of our character. Unlike Taylor, however, Sokolowski’s description of wanting does not distinguish between first-order desires (or what Sokolowski refers to as dispositional wishes) and *second-order desires*. According to Taylor (1976), weak evaluation is the kind of assessment that goes along with deliberating what to choose in view of a purpose or in weighing up preferences. Such evaluation is weak, he thinks, because it simply accepts the first-order desires as good and then tries to figure out how to satisfy them in the best way. *Strong evaluation*, for Taylor, does not involve deliberation in view of our purposes but self-reflection, specifically on the goodness or badness of our wishes themselves. Expressing Taylor’s view in my own words, strong evaluation is made possible by our ability to ask the question “what kind of person do I wish to be?” In answering this self-reflective question, an agent of truth has articulated what Taylor calls a second-order desire which represents how we wish our first-order desires to be. For example, by reflecting on my first-order desire for luscious desserts after meals, I might formulate the second-order desire that “I wish to be the kind of person that wishes for fruit after meals instead”. But how does any of this relate to human freedom? Freedom, I propose, is an achievement of veracity for two distinguishable yet related reasons. First, the ability to formulate second-order desires through strong evaluation means that we can largely choose what our desires are, thereby making us free to change the kind of people we are and the lives we lead. We would hardly call ourselves free if we could choose in view of a purpose or between preferences, but not be able to choose the wishes that determine who we are in a significant way. Second, I suggest that when an agent reflects on his dispositional wishes

¹⁵ For example, the salesman may not be engaging his desire to sell cars when not at work, but if he overhears someone interested in buying an expensive car on his evening off his dispositional desire to sell cars could become activated, in which case his wish becomes a purpose.

with the question “who do I wish to be?” he is attempting to understand that which is best for his well-being, to determine the kind of person he needs to become if he is to be successful as a human person.

Taken together, these two points amount to an interpretation of Sokolowski’s claim that ‘freedom...is adherence to what is best’. That is: the kind of freedom peculiar to agents of truth consists in the ability to self-reflectively determine the kind of wishing that they perceive as best for their well-being and therefore direct their lives in a way that defines their character. It is important to note that I have taken Sokolowski to mean not that freedom consists in actually doing what *is* best but what an agent *believes* is best having tried to be sincere and accurate in his strong evaluations. On this account it follows that the completely free agent is the one whose second-order desires have been executed so consistently and well that they have become first-order desires. Such a person is exactly who he wishes to be because it is how he believes he should be.¹⁶ When an agent formulates a second-order desire, yet acts in accord with his dispositional first-order desire that runs contrary to the fruits of his strong evaluation, then we can say that the agent has failed in exercising his freedom for he has not adhered to what he identified as best. This unique possibility of practical reasoning I consider to be the problem of *akrasia* or incontinence – a problem that is beyond the scope of this paper to treat. As I have indicated, freedom implies responsibility. By turning to an analysis of this feature of a moral ontology of the human person, I not only explain our nature as responsible agents but deepen my account of freedom.

Responsibility: Trust and Truth in Speech and Action

In this section, I attempt to explain how human responsibility is involved with Sokolowski’s idea of veracity. This entails a) relating the idea of responsibility to freedom and b) elucidating the public way in which Sokolowski can be taken to believe that we are engaged in responsibility through speech and action. I begin with task a), insisting with Sokolowski (1985: 54) that an

¹⁶ This is an important point to note if we are to avoid an overly voluntaristic account of human desire. Compared to weak evaluation, with which we guide our everyday pre-reflective activities, strong evaluation is infrequent. The person who achieves moral excellence on this account should not be thought of as someone who is all the time confronting his immediate situation as a strong evaluator. Rather, like everyone else, he is usually involved in his situation on the basis of his habituated first-order desires and his well-trained weak evaluation. What makes these desires, and the actions ensuing from them, free is that the agent has on some previous occasion(s) reflectively endorsed these desires.

agent can be responsible for his actions only to the extent that they can be said to be *his own*. What gives an action the character of ownness, he contends, is not simply the fact that the action proceeded from an agent's body. We would not say, for instance, that an agent bears responsibility for the act of screaming when it is induced by sudden and extreme pain. An action is one's own, he argues, when the agent has used his practical reasoning to appraise a situation and is able to act in accord with how he understands his circumstances (1985: 56). What this means is that responsibility is related to freedom not in its actuality, but in its possibility. To explain this, even a person who has never engaged in strong evaluation, and is therefore existing as an unfree agent of truth, is still responsible for his "own" actions because he has the *capacity* to exercise his reason by formulating second-order desires. That is to say, each person is responsible for whom he is insofar as he has that special syntactical ability that constitutes freedom: to formulate a second-order desire in view of changing a first-order desire.¹⁷ It is only when an agent actualises his freedom that he properly accepts responsibility for who he is by trying to do the right thing. Having extrapolated the basic relationship between freedom and responsibility, I now move on to b) and attempt to identify with Sokolowski how responsibility is a public involvement in veracity.

At this point, one might begin to associate an egoistic imaginary with the moral ontology of the human person I have been setting forth – one where the moral actor is identified simply as someone who engages in solitary self-reflection with a view to determining what is best for his own well-being. That I shall argue for the essential entanglement of moral action with others should come as no surprise when we consider that, for Sokolowski, moral categoriality is just one specific form of syntax conceived more generally and must therefore be subject to the logic of our default condition which identifies us first and foremost intersubjectively in the human conversation. Indeed, as was already mentioned, he considers moral *transactions* between agents to be the structure of moral life. The concept of responsibility is unique in my account because it helps us to understand in greater depth how the moral actor is constituted publicly, thereby

¹⁷ The relationship of responsibility to the capacity for freedom can be captured with an example of intuitive moral sentiments. When we find a boorish person at a party – eating rudely, pushing, interrupting, not listening, etc. – we tend to think that he is responsible for his actions because he has either freely chosen to be this way or he has failed to exercise his freedom by attempting to bring his behaviour in accord with what is best. However, if we later learn that this person is mentally ill or cognitively hampered in some way our attribution of responsibility will be at least mitigated, if not retracted completely. We recognise that this person may not completely possess the sophisticated syntactical skills to formulate and act in accord with second-order desires.

allowing us to escape any charges of egoism. Based on Sokolowski's thought, I am able to determine two primary senses in which the agent of truth is publicly constituted through responsibility, namely in i) manifesting the world truthfully so that others can achieve truth and ii) in manifesting the world truthfully to protect others from direct harm. I discuss each of these in their turn.

i) I argue that Sokolowski's view entails that our responsibility is at first and normally for others insofar as we are bound up in necessary relations of manifestation in the human conversation. Remaining true to his position that reason is to be found publicly Sokolowski analyses syntax as it shows up between a speaker and a listener. He contends that syntax does more than just coordinate words, identifying two important types of *signalling* that takes place in speech. In the first kind of signal, when an individual makes a statement he is performing some grammatical function(s), thereby signalling his rationality to the listener. The second kind of signalling described by Sokolowski is that any syntactic operation conducted by the speaker is an indication for the listener to make the very same syntactic move (87). We can infer from Sokolowski's analysis that unless a listener follows the speaker's syntactic operations then he will fail to understand what is being said. Crucially, he claims that the listener only allows the speaker to syntactically guide his mind because he has an 'elementary trust' that the speaker is attempting to manifest the world truthfully (65). If there was no trace of such trust, Sokolowski implies, communication would be impossible as no person would ever willingly make themselves a listener.¹⁸ While Sokolowski focuses on acts of manifestation involving a speaker and a listener in speech, we must not forget that manifestation is continually taking place between *actors* and *watchers* in the practical sphere. That is to say, when a watcher follows an actor's movements he trusts that the actor is doing what he believes is truthful or good and right.¹⁹ Furthermore, we must recognise that the dividing line between speech and action is

¹⁸ To help illustrate this point, we can see the breakdown in communication when one individual places no trust in the word of another. In such a case the listener either completely ignores the speaker or gives no heed to his word. The former has no reason to listen to the latter. If everyone was completely mistrustful of one another, believing in the constitutional deceitfulness of human persons, then it is hard to see how communication could be established. Indeed, the importance of trust for human development is famously highlighted by psychotherapist Erik H. Erikson (1994) who identifies a basic sense of trust as the first achievement of the individual – before the child can even speak – that serves as the basis for the success of all future developments.

¹⁹ When a workman does a shoddy job or a politician takes bribes, they are both showing up the world in a way that others could take as truthful, if the latter place sufficient trust in the former. The apprentice, if not careful, could see the shoddy jobs of the head workman as acceptable and go on to emulate this, just as the politician could create a

extremely vague for our actions and words are sandwiched by one another, like when we talk about doing something and then do it or else do something and then talk about it, and often we are speaking while we are acting. To use phrases that capture the interrelatedness of speech and action in manifesting the world, I refer to agents of truth as *speech-actors* and *listen-watchers*.

Although Sokolowski does not explicitly make the argument, his position indicates that if truth is achieved at first and normally in the human conversation and communication requires trust, then one's own veracity relies on trusting in the veracity of others (66). Based on this relationship of truth and trust, Sokolowski believes that speech-actors are responsible for the development of the listen-watcher's veracity insofar as their acts of manifestation can, to some degree or other,²⁰ direct the listen-watcher towards truth or falsehood (66). What this view entails, I propose, is that a speech-actor is responsible for the cultivation of his own veracity because he is first and foremost responsible for the veracity of others. But does the listen-watcher not have his own responsibility? And is this not an egoistic concern to protect his own veracity and well-being by assessing the truth-value of another's claims and actions, while discriminating with regard to the degree of trust he should put in different speech-actors on different areas of manifestation? Although Sokolowski does not directly address the responsibility of the listen-watcher, I propose that the latter's responsibility for his own veracity is a function of his responsibility as a *potential* speech-actor. In clarification of this, the responsible listen-watcher must not make poor judgements of trust or allow himself to be led astray by false disclosures, precisely because failures in his veracity will encourage similar shortcomings in others when it is his turn to manifest the world as a speech-actor. Although the capacity for freedom or strong evaluation is required for responsibility, we are responsible for engaging our freedom insofar as our speech and actions manifest the world to others. We derive responsibility for ourselves, as speech-actors and listen-watchers, through our responsibility for others.

culture of bribery because of the influence his actions have on others. The diligent workman and the honest politician in cultivating their veracity inspire others to do the same.

²⁰ In an unpublished paper attempting to tease out Sokolowski's conception of trust, Kristyn Brown (2010) perceptively distinguishes between the elementary trust constitutive of the default condition briefly discussed above and Sokolowski's implicit understanding of what she refers to as discursive trust. The latter, notes Brown, has to do with the mature agent of truth in his attempt to discern, through interaction with others, between those who are trustworthy and those who are not. In effect, Brown claims that the degree to which the mind of a speaker can influence the mind of a listener is ultimately conditioned by the degree of trust that the latter places in the former.

ii) Sokolowski's thought implies a second sense in which agents of truth are responsible. This sense has to do with those ways in which an individual's failure to be sincere and accurate can impact the well-being of listen-watchers, other than by manifesting falsehoods to them. The point is most clearly illustrated if we return to Sokolowski's idea that an action becomes one's own responsibility when it is a result of one's practical reasoning. He claims that we are responsible for how our actions effect others, if, through our practical reasoning, we foresaw the consequences or we should have foreseen them (264). That is to say, Sokolowski holds that we are responsible for manifesting the world truthfully to ourselves because a failure in veracity could have deleterious consequences for those around us. For example, by allowing ourselves to lie to legitimate law enforcement, doing shoddy construction work or judging a traffic situation poorly, one could put the well-being of others at risk and the responsible agent should see this possibility. Once again, in such cases, our responsibility for ourselves in manifesting and acting in the world truthfully is derived from our responsibility to others. Such responsibility reveals another dimension to Sokolowski's idea of trust, namely that listen-watchers trust that speech-actors, in attempting to manifest the world truthfully, will not cause them harm. We expect people to exercise their veracity and therefore their responsibility well by not lying to legitimate law enforcement, just as we expect the workman to do a good job and drivers to be attentive and cautious in traffic.

As speech-actors and listen-watchers (or speech-actors to be), we have a large burden of responsibility to others insofar as they rely on us to be able to exercise our veracity well. This would seem to make Sokolowski's notion of moral categoriality very broad indeed, establishing moral transactions regularly throughout the course of even one's most banal day. Indeed, it may be counter-intuitive for some to understand moral action as playing such a large role in our lives. Though Sokolowski does not explicitly take a position on this point, we should consider two small but extremely important points as a means towards demonstrating just how permeated and permeable our lives are with moral transactions. First, it is implicit in Sokolowski's understanding of moral categoriality that moral transaction do not just happen between agents that are present. Evidently there can be material, and therefore moral, transactions between agents that are absent from one another's presence.²¹ Think once again of the moral

²¹ Indeed, Sokolowski has dedicated substantial space in *Phenomenology of the Human Person* and some of his other work (1978) to that special function of reason that allows agents of truth to think of things in their absence.

responsibilities the workman may find himself confronted with in just some of his occupational moral transactions (not to mention those in his personal life). In acting responsibly, he is doing his work well and thereby manifesting the world truthfully to his apprentice who is present in the moral transaction, but he is also constructing the building for individuals who are absent insofar as they are people whom he will never meet but who depend on his acting responsibly for their safety or even just for their comfort. Here the workman, in acting responsibly, has established two moral transactions by taking both the apprentice's sound training and the future inhabitant's safety and comfort as his own good.²² Second, as we shall see below, Sokolowski believes that we can establish both short-term purposes that we immediately go about fulfilling as well as long-term purposes that can be taken up and left aside at intervals. Insofar as purposes provide us with our goals in life and therefore structure our actions, it seems that moral transactions are closely related to our specific purposes. To illustrate the point, the workman with the purpose of building a house is open to a specific set of moral transactions that are different to the lawyer in defending a client or the driver in getting to his destination. As it is with purposes then, moral transactions can be both fleeting one-off occasions but they can also be sustained over long-periods. Our ability to establish moral transaction between both present and absent agents, and our capacity to establish new moral transactions while picking up more familiar ones at intervals, should give us a good sense of just how big a role moral categoriality plays in our lives. Now that I have argued for the intersubjective character of my Sokolowski-based moral ontology with the idea of responsibility, I move on to elucidate the concept of *phronēsis* which binds well-being, virtue, freedom and responsibility together in the process of acting well.

Practical Syntax: *Phronēsis*

According to Sokolowski, like human speech, human action is intelligent to the extent that it is syntactically structured (101). In other words, he believes that intelligent action is constituted by the ability to do this in view of that. He presents a treatment of intelligent human action or practical syntax which can be seen as a value neutral interpretation of what is involved in practical reasoning. I call it value neutral because practical syntax, as he elucidates it, can be

²² It is important to recognise that while the agent is responsible for others and derives his responsibility for himself through his responsibility for others, it is the moral categoriality of the individual agent(s) that establishes all relationships of responsibility. What is crucial is that the workman *recognises* his responsibility to those his actions affect and to act sincerely and accurately in light of this.

performed deftly by both the good man and the bad man.²³ This is somewhat of a phenomenological shortcoming on Sokolowski's part for the essence of practical syntax, like any essence, can only be properly determined by understanding it at its best. The perfection of practical syntax is what Aristotle calls *phronēsis* – that kind of practical reasoning that is performed by the good man in achieving the virtuous mean of right action. In what follows, I attempt to improve upon Sokolowski's account of practical syntax with some help from Aristotle's understanding of *phronēsis* and Heidegger's notion of worldhood. Crucially, I must also explain the unique relationship that *phronēsis* has with the other elements of moral ontology that have been discussed in this paper.

Sokolowski is in general agreement with Aristotle's syllogistic description of practical reasoning (251). According to Aristotle, the major premise in practical reasoning amounts to a purpose or concretised wish (1984: 1114b1-2). In the minor premise, Aristotle believes that through an act of *nous* or intuitive perception the individual's circumstances are manifested to him in a way that relates to his purpose (1984: 1143a32-1143b6). It is only through such a disclosure of situation and purpose, he insists, that the *modus operandi* of practical reasoning can take place, namely deliberation over the best means that one can pursue with a view to achieving the purpose. The conclusion of the syllogism, he continues, is the result of deliberation and it is equivalent to the action. Practical reasoning can be called *phronēsis*, for Aristotle, when the desire or purpose is good for it is only then that deliberation over the appropriate means can be considered morally good (1984: 1144a36-37). Sokolowski's major criticism of this account is its implication that purposes only exist when they are being actualised (251), like when I deliberate about how to calm someone who has approached me with hostility. However, as I have already noted, Sokolowski thinks that our dispositions are formed by wishes. He insists that the practical reasoning that goes into the sophisticated purpose of building a house, for instance, can be actualised at different times over months and years (245). Furthermore, he identifies a wider sense in which practical reasoning takes place in view of the complex purposes involved in

²³ Indeed, in *Moral Action*, Sokolowski recognises that moral categoriality is 'value-free' in the sense that all it does is to establish a moral transaction between agents. He insists that it is only judgemental categoriality that can determine whether an action is right or wrong (1985:151-2). However, as I now make clear, we are not interested in judgemental categoriality here nor in the moral categoriality of the bad man – what Aristotle calls 'cleverness' (1984:1144a26-29) – but the moral categoriality of the good man, what Aristotle calls *phronēsis*.

exercising what Heidegger would call one's potentiality-for-being – e.g. the general purpose of being a doctor, builder, mother, friend, etc. (246).

For Sokolowski, purposes are the motivating forces behind our actions and give them sense. Yet, he makes little effort to bring out the precise manner in which the different kinds of purposes he mentions are related. To fill this gap, I turn to Heidegger's conception of worldhood which he identifies as the structure within which all practical action takes place. He posits that actions consist of an in-order-to (immediate purpose to be achieved), a wherein or arrangement (practical context), a with-which (item(s) of equipment), a towards-which (general purpose to be achieved) and a for-the-sake-of-which (potentiality-for-being) (2005/1927: 119-20). The meaning of these terms are best expressed using an example: I am explaining worldhood *with* the use of a computer and books *in-order-to* make better sense of Sokolowski's idea of practical syntax, *in* my study-room where the equipment is *arranged*, as a step *towards* writing an essay on moral ontology *for the sake of* my being a philosopher.²⁴ What we can see from this description is something that Sokolowski fails to mention, namely that there is a syntactic hierarchy of purposes. To be more specific, not only is there syntax to our actions where we *do* action X in view of purpose Y, but there is a syntactical structure between purposes where one purpose is *formed* in view of a more general purpose. From the above example, it is clear that the purpose guiding my in-order-to makes sense only in terms of the purpose constituting my towards-which and this in turn gets its explanation from the purpose in my potentiality-for-being. What Heidegger does not bring out, however, is that not even my potentiality-for-being can make final sense of my purposes and therefore my actions. I propose that potentiality-for-being, in its turn, only makes sense as a function of the human person's essence, namely to desire its own well-being in all that it does. To continue with the example, the formation of my purpose to be a philosopher is not ultimately explicable by my wish to be a philosopher. Such a purpose is made intelligible because I have chosen it in accord with my essential desire to achieve what I perceive to be well-being. Yet in saying this we must not forget from our previous discussion of well-being that it is not simply another tier in the hierarchy of purposes for it is an end that accompanies all purposes.

With this outline of *phronēsis* in place, I am in a position to explain its unique relationship with the other elements of moral ontology. As the know-how of right action, I

²⁴ The formula for this example is roughly taken from Dreyfuss (1992: 92).

consider *phronēsis* to involve not only a manifestation of the human person's given situation but also of its very being in the situation. As Heidegger puts it in his analysis of this concept, *phronēsis* makes the human person transparent to itself (1997: 100). What this minimally entails on my view is that *phronēsis* involves the understanding of oneself as an agent of truth that is engaged in the world as *responsible* for *freely* acting in accord with what one *sincerely* and *accurately* perceives to be best for one's own *well-being*. *Phronēsis* discloses our freedom because the desire or purpose it has in view is the result of strong evaluation, that is, the kind of desire that expresses the kind of person one believes one should be. This means that the purpose constituting the major premise of *phronēsis* can only be considered *morally* good, as opposed to simply good, if it has been chosen through strong evaluation.²⁵ Since the desire for well-being is essential to all our purposes, *phronēsis* also manifests this desire in disclosing the purpose. As the attempt to discover how to act well in satisfying one's freely chosen purpose – directed as it is by the desire for well-being – *phronēsis* aims at hitting the mean of virtuous action. That is to say, its *telos* is the achievement of Sincerity and Accuracy. Finally, when the human person attempts to be sincere and accurate in view of his freely chosen desires we say that he is taking hold of his responsibility as an agent of truth. To clarify this, in *phronēsis* the human person has taken responsibility for who he is and how he relates to others by attempting to determine the truth of his situation and to act accordingly.

On the possibility of moral phenomenology

At this point in the paper, I have completed my basic outline of some of the key elements of a moral ontology of the human person based on Sokolowski's thought. In this final part, I attempt to explain how the kind of moral ontology I have set forth could help moral phenomenology meet the four criteria outlined at the beginning of this paper. Before directly addressing this issue, however, it will be useful to deal with a potential objection to the account I have provided.

²⁵ This I consider to be a novel application of Aristotle's contention that it is not enough for the virtuous man to appear virtuous – he must also have chosen to be virtuous (1984: 1105a30-1105b4). On my view, our desires can only be considered morally good if they have been chosen by us. This is not to say that an individual cannot have a good desire that he did not choose, e.g. the desire to exercise. However, such a good desire only becomes properly moral when it has been chosen through strong evaluation. There is a qualitative difference between the man who exercises because that is what he has always been inclined to do and the man who does so because he has decided for himself that exercise is good and that he wants to be the kind of person that participates in this good. The latter, in attempting to determine the truth of things, is engaging his veracity more fully than the former.

It may be argued that in this paper I have only dealt with moral action and have neglected studying moral emotion, which makes up a large part of the experiential aspect of our moral life. How would my account, for instance, be helpful in comparing and contrasting anger and disgust? To this I make a double reply. First, moral emotion should not be seen as separate from moral action for the former is always experienced in the context of the latter. To clarify this, moral emotion is merely part of an account of moral action for the primary importance of the former is how it motivates us to *act*. I did not set out to provide anything like a complete moral ontology and so the nature of moral emotion, amongst other things, is not adequately dealt with. Nevertheless, I believe my account hints at the direction in which an ontological analysis of moral emotion might be pursued. It is well noted by Sokolowski (22) and others²⁶ that, for the most part, emotions do not stand alone but are informed by reason. So, in normal cases I become angry only if I have the belief that some kind of infringement on another person or thing has taken place. Essentially, it is some kind of evaluative belief established by our moral categoriality that gives rise to moral emotions. Therefore, further analysing the idea of moral categoriality as the basis of moral emotions would seem like a good place to start to help fill in this gap in the moral ontology I have presented. Second, while in one sense moral emotions are something that happen to us, in another sense we have a large degree of control over them at least insofar as they are based on our evaluative beliefs. As such, it seems that a number of the ideas discussed above also apply to moral emotions. To explain this, it seems that we can think of moral emotions themselves, and not just the actions proceeding from them, as virtuous or vicious; just as we can think of them as being free or unfree depending on whether or not the beliefs that undergird them have been uncritically accepted or else reflectively appropriated in accord with strong evaluation; and insofar as we can control our moral emotions, we would seem to bear responsibility for them. What these two arguments suggest is that, though I do not explicitly deal with moral emotions in this paper, my Sokolowski-based moral ontology of the human person will inform an ontology of moral emotions in important respects.

Now let us turn to discuss how moral phenomenology can meet the first criterion for being a viable field of study that can make a worthwhile contribution to moral philosophy, namely by a) being about a unified subject matter, i.e. moral experience. Regarding this criterion, Horgan and Simmons state: ‘Presumably, in examining whatever unity there might be in moral

²⁶ For example, Drummond (2008: 39) and Taylor (1985: 2).

experience, one is looking for common elements that are constitutive of those experiences...What is wanted is some interesting kind of commonality, if it exists' (2008: 121). In outlining a moral ontology of the human person, it is precisely this that I have been trying to demonstrate. As should be clear from my final comments on *phronēsis* above, as that which makes the human person and his moral situation transparent to himself, that which is experienced in *phronēsis* is at least common to moral experience. When we ask about the moral experience of an agent, we must ask how he experienced himself as more or less sincere and accurate in pursuing well-being; whether or not he experienced his desires and beliefs as something appropriated freely and therefore belonging to him, or else as something unthinkingly inherited; how he has taken hold of his responsibility in relation to himself and others; and, we should add, how his beliefs informed his emotional responses, not to mention the emotional responses themselves. But what makes us think, as Horgan and Simmons demand of us, that any of this represents *interesting* commonalities in moral experience? I shortly attempt to answer this question in my discussion of the criterion of robustness below.

For now, I turn to the second criterion for the viability and worthwhileness of moral phenomenology, specifically b) by being about moral experiences that are widely shared. Just how wide does moral ontology make moral experience? Does it transcend personal ethics and cultural boundaries? An obvious implication of the moral ontology I have presented is that the elements of moral experience it specifies are not just wide, but universal. Insofar as I have derived a moral ontology from Sokolowski's account of the human person, and this is not a culturally relative account but one dealing with the essence of the human person, then the moral universalism that follows is necessitated. This claim to a universal moral ontology may be more than moral phenomenology needs or even desires to sufficiently meet the criterion of wideness. Though I stand by my account, moral phenomenology could still be both viable and worthwhile if it restricted itself to a culturally distinct moral ontology. For example, in attempting to ground his theory of justice John Rawls (1993) outlines what he considers to be the liberal-democratic moral psychology that allows for the sustainability of modern, just institutions over time. A moral phenomenology, not wishing to make universal claims but wanting to be wide enough to be useful, could successfully focus on describing how the liberal-democratic citizen experiences his moral life. However, as I shall argue in discussing the next criterion, it is moral phenomenology itself that must determine just how wide it can be.

The third criterion to be addressed is that moral phenomenology must be c) sufficiently independent of moral theories and pre-formed moral judgements. As we saw in stating Gill's criticism in the first section, this criterion is important so that moral phenomenology can objectively adjudicate between competing moral experiences and the moral theories they inform. Yet the idea that moral phenomenology must be independent of moral presuppositions, whether ontological or normative or meta-ethical, seems to place higher standards on this discipline than we are willing to place on any other. The wrong-headedness of Gill's suggestion that moral phenomenology must be independent of moral presuppositions is captured by Karl Popper in the following example. He recounts the time when he instructed some of his students to take pen and paper, and "observe". Of course, he relates, they asked "observe what?" The point he tries to make with this example is that the instruction "observe" is absurd without a particular object or group of objects on which to focus attention, and, furthermore, some sense of what one is trying to find in those objects (1962: 46). On this view, there is no inquiry that proceeds without some prior idea of what is being looked for in the inquiry. Moral phenomenology, like any other mode of inquiry, is indeed theory-laden. Does this mean we must grant Gill's point that moral phenomenology cannot objectively adjudicate between competing moral theories? I think not. What we must realise is that while moral phenomenology is the study of first-person moral experience, as a discipline it is not restricted to the mind of individuals but, rather, is very much a critical public enterprise. Like all other respected disciplines, moral phenomenology must proceed by means of what I call *discursive self-correction*. To explain this, the claims of moral phenomenology must be viewed as public adventures in manifestation that, through dialogue with other practitioners, can be criticised and refined. Conceived in this way, the necessary theory-ladenness of moral phenomenology seems unproblematic as its inability to take a pre-theoretic view of things can be overcome to the greatest extent possible through the ongoing public process of discursive self-correction. The partial moral ontology I have outlined in this paper, for instance, is now available for criticism and improvement. In fact, it is in this way that the criterion of b) wideness can be empirically specified by moral phenomenology itself. Engaging with the moral phenomenologies and moral ontologies of individuals from different cultures or distinct belief-systems appears to be the only way of truly determining the extent to which the scope of moral phenomenology is universal or culturally relative. Should we find

significant commonalities in moral experience in diverse corners of the world, moral phenomenology may at least be said to have cross-cultural relevance.

Finally, can we say that moral phenomenology might be d) robust enough to distinguish between competing moral theories? If we accept the phenomenologically derived moral ontology of the human person outlined in this paper, or something like it, then it is clear that moral phenomenology can yield commonalities in moral experience that are interesting enough to discriminate between different moral theories. Let me take two related examples to illustrate my point. It seems that neither of the traditional categories of egoism or altruism are supported by the moral ontology of this paper. As already mentioned, the fact that moral action always has the well-being of the individual speech-actor in view means that the traditional idea of a *selfless* deed does not exist. However, neither can we say that moral life is tantamount to egoism or the related categories of selfishness or enlightened self-interest. As Sokolowski's insights regarding the public nature of language and the achievement of truth imply, the pursuit of one's own well-being only makes sense in the context of being a good speech-actor in the public world for the sake of truthfully guiding the minds of listen-watchers who are in pursuit of their own well-being. Undercutting the egoism-altruism distinction in this way, the moral ontology I have presented suggests the need for an alternative moral category that understands the involvement of one's self and others in all human speech and action. There can be no altruistic action without self-concern nor egoistic action without concern for others. Beyond these examples of egoism and altruism, there is not space here for a thoroughgoing account of how the moral ontology I have presented differentiates between competing moral theories. What can be said is that this moral ontology is clearly akin to virtue ethics in many important respects, thereby excluding significant deontological, utilitarian, and consequentialist tenets, amongst others. This at least should suggest that moral phenomenology can be sufficiently robust – just as it can be adequately unified, wide and independent – to be a viable pursuit that can make a worthwhile contribution to moral philosophy.

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