

Human Flourishing, Psychological Wellbeing, and Virtue

IX Aretai International Conference - Proben Project
European University of Rome
15-17 September 2025

Abstract Book
ed. by Claudia Navarini and Anna Contardi

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Foreword

The Connection between Virtue, Flourishing, and Psychological Well-Being

This volume brings together the abstracts of the IX Aretai International Conference on *Human Flourishing, Psychological Well-Being, and Virtue*, held at the European University of Rome from 15 to 17 September 2025. The conference continues the Aretai Center on Virtues' commitment to fostering rigorous interdisciplinary dialogue among philosophy, psychology, education, and related fields on the enduring question of what it means to live well.

A distinctive feature of this edition was its collaboration with the PROBEN Project (*4 Challenges 4 Well-Being*), a major national research initiative funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research. This partnership has provided a valuable interface between normative inquiry and large-scale empirical investigation. Although the project is still underway, its preliminary findings already indicate several significant lines of development. In particular, PROBEN contributes to a more differentiated understanding of the relationship between psychological well-being and character formation among young people, drawing attention to the impact of digital environments, behavioural patterns, and emerging vulnerabilities such as smartphone addiction. At the same time, it advances and

tests intervention models that aim not only to mitigate risk factors but also to cultivate positive capacities, including self-regulation, resilience, and meaningful engagement.

In this respect, PROBEN offers an important empirical complement to the theoretical frameworks explored at the conference, suggesting that the promotion of well-being is inseparable from the formation of stable dispositions and evaluative competences. Its future developments are expected to inform both scholarly research and the design of educational and preventive strategies integrating psychological and ethical dimensions of human flourishing.

The thematic focus of the conference reflected a growing recognition, within both academic discourse and public debate, of the need to articulate a more comprehensive account of well-being. Contemporary psychological approaches often emphasise subjective satisfaction or the balanced fulfilment of individual needs. While such perspectives have yielded important insights, they do not fully capture the normative dimension of human life. By contrast, the philosophical tradition – particularly through the concept of *eudaimonia* – understands flourishing as a life structured by meaningful activity, rational reflection, and the development of human capacities. The tension between these approaches underscored the need for conceptual frameworks capable of integrating descriptive and normative accounts without reducing one to the other.

The contributions assembled in this volume address this challenge from a range of disciplinary and methodological perspectives. They examine the conceptual relations between flourishing, well-being, and happiness; the role of virtue in shaping both individual lives and social practices; and the conditions under which human capacities can be developed and sustained. Particular attention is devoted to the processes of virtue formation and their application in fields such as educa-

tion, healthcare, and public policy. Several contributions also engage with methodological questions, exploring how qualitative and quantitative approaches may be productively combined in the study of human flourishing and well-being.

The conference further marks an important stage in the development of the Aretai Center on Virtues. Since its foundation in 2016, Aretai has evolved into an inter-university research network connecting Italian and international institutions, with the aim of advancing the study and application of virtue ethics in contemporary contexts. The diversity of contributions presented at this conference – 76 papers from scholars representing 18 countries – attests to the vitality of this network and to the growing relevance of virtue-based approaches in addressing contemporary ethical and social challenges.

The Aretai Center has also been honoured to confer the Second Aretai Prize in Virtue Ethics on Professor Julia Annas, whose work has been instrumental in the contemporary renewal of virtue ethics. Her scholarship has significantly contributed to clarifying the conceptual foundations of the field and continues to shape ongoing debates in moral philosophy.

This volume is offered as a contribution to an ongoing and necessarily open inquiry. The study of human flourishing requires sustained engagement across disciplines and contexts, as well as a careful balance between theoretical reflection and practical application. It is hoped that the contributions collected here will support further research, dialogue, and collaboration, and will contribute to a deeper understanding of the conditions under which human beings and communities may genuinely flourish.

Claudia Navarini and Anna Contardi

Fostering Flourishing: The Role of Virtues in Enhancing Teachers' Well-Being and Reducing Burnout

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The theory of character strengths identifies three core virtues – caring, inquisitiveness, and self-control – from which the 24 character strengths are derived (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). These virtues are considered fundamental to human flourishing and play a critical role in supporting teachers' psychological well-being.

Research on teacher well-being has grown significantly in recent years, emphasizing its importance for health, professional engagement, and teaching quality, as well as its impact on student learning outcomes (Zhou et al., 2024). Teachers with high well-being are better equipped to handle professional challenges (Angelini et al., 2024), form strong teacher-student relationships (Spilt et al., 2011), and foster positive learning environments (Klusmann et al., 2016). Despite this growing interest, limited studies have explored the influence of character virtues on well-being and engagement in teachers, especially in relation to burnout and self-efficacy.

This study investigates how these virtues contribute to reducing burnout while enhancing self-efficacy, engagement, and overall well-being among teachers. A sample of 339 Italian teachers (85.5% female, Mage=45, SD=7) completed several

validated measures, including the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS-V3; McGrath, 2017) to assess character virtues, the Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT; Schaufeli et al., 2020; Angelini et al., 2021) to evaluate burnout levels, the Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES-SF; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Biasi et al., 2014) to measure self-efficacy, the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-3; Schaufeli et al., 2017; Balducci et al., 2010) to gauge work engagement, and the Mental Health Continuum-Short Form (MHC-SF; Keyes, 2002; Petrillo et al., 2015) to assess well-being. Path analysis revealed the significant role of virtues in fostering engagement and well-being, with notable indirect effects mediated by reductions in burnout and improvements in self-efficacy.

These findings highlight how cultivating virtues supports psychological well-being and aligns with broader frameworks of human flourishing (McGrath et al., 2018; Lomas, 2019). Inquisitiveness stands out for its transformative potential in enhancing teachers' professional and personal outcomes (Lavy, 2019; Watson, 2019), while caring underscores the importance of distinguishing its relational and motivational dimensions (Mayseless, 2015; Yu et al., 2022). Self-control proves crucial for managing professional challenges (Proctor et al., 2014; Proyer et al., 2015). The roles of burnout and self-efficacy in shaping engagement and well-being are evident (Xie et al., 2020; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), suggesting that interventions targeting these factors can significantly enhance teachers' psychological resources.

This research emphasizes the value of integrating psychological perspectives into educational settings to foster human flourishing and support educators' well-being (Hascher & Waber, 2021; Zhou et al., 2024).

Virtue and Flourishing

Julia Annas

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This paper examines the relationship between virtue and human flourishing within a neo-Aristotelian framework, focusing on the conceptual and practical obstacles that prevent their integration in contemporary thought. While ancient ethical theories regarded virtue as central – indeed necessary, and for some sufficient – for flourishing, modern perspectives often separate the two, influenced by reductive accounts of happiness and by misconceptions about virtue.

The analysis begins by clarifying the notion of flourishing as a life considered as a whole, structured by the agent's aims, choices, and evaluative reflections. Unlike contemporary notions of subjective well-being, flourishing is not reducible to how one feels about one's life or to favorable external circumstances. Rather, it involves agency, aspiration, and the ongoing shaping of one's life through meaningful commitments. A major obstacle arises from the tendency to equate flourishing with subjective happiness or externally produced satisfaction, thereby neglecting the agent's active role in giving coherence and value to life.

The paper then explores the nature of virtue, emphasizing its developmental and dynamic character. Virtues are not static

traits or habitual routines, but evolving dispositions structured like practical skills, involving intelligent, context-sensitive responsiveness. Drawing on recent work in moral psychology, the author argues that virtuous action is “intelligent all the way down,” integrating cognition, emotion, and motivation. Another obstacle is the widespread misunderstanding of virtue as either rigid rule-following or mindless habit, both of which obscure its flexible, reason-guided nature.

Bringing virtue and flourishing together, the paper argues that virtues are not independent or modular traits but are integrated through practical intelligence (*phronesis*), which enables agents to navigate conflicts among competing demands. Virtue plays both a guiding and a constraining role: it shapes the pursuit of life goals and sets limits on acceptable means. Crucially, virtue is not an optional component that can be added to an otherwise ordinary life; rather, it transforms the agent’s entire evaluative framework, giving meaning and coherence to all pursuits.

The paper also addresses resistance to the demanding nature of virtue ethics, including the perception that a fully virtuous life is unrealistically harmonious or excessively demanding. By distinguishing between the ideal virtuous agent and ordinary agents characterized by internal conflict, it shows that aspiration toward virtue remains both realistic and essential.

Ultimately, the paper argues that understanding flourishing requires recognizing the central, transformative role of virtue in structuring a meaningful human life.

Wellbeing Consists in Getting What Your Best Self Would Want

Alexander Arridge

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This paper defends *Virtue-Desire Theory of Wellbeing* (VDT): Your wellbeing consists in getting what your best self would want. It argues that VDT captures the plausible elements of both eudaimonism and desire theories of wellbeing, whilst avoiding the worst implications of each.

Eudaimonism – the view that wellbeing consists in cultivating and exercising virtue – is an attractive theory of wellbeing that faces well-known problems.

First, eudaimonism implies that morality and prudence cannot conflict: it is always good for you to do the morally best thing. This is implausible: if morality requires you to sacrifice your life, then morality requires you to do something that is clearly prudentially sub-optimal.

Second, virtue is not the only thing that is good for you: even Aristotle, an archetypal eudaimonist, allowed that things other than virtue – the “external goods” – can be good for you (EN, 1099a29-30). Eudaimonism struggles coherently to explain this. Desire theory – the view that wellbeing consists in getting what you want – does not face these problems. But it faces other problems: agents may want things that are clearly bad for them, or fail to want things that are clearly good for

them. These problems also blight extant ideal-desire views, on which wellbeing consists in getting what a fully informed version of you would want: even with full information, you may fail to desire what is clearly good for you.

The above problems can be avoided by moving to a hybrid theory like *VDT*. On *VDT*, your wellbeing consists in getting what your best self would want. Your best self is your closest virtuous counterpart; to get your best self, take all the features that essentially constitute you as a particular person – your beliefs, desires, plans, abilities, etc. – and add all the attitudes and dispositions constitutive of ethical virtue. If any of your essential features are incompatible with virtue, then change these features as little as possible so that they are no longer incompatible. The resulting person is your best self – you, but if you were virtuous. *VDT* can explain why morality and prudence can come apart: morally required self-sacrifice is bad for you if your best self, despite wanting to live morally, also wants things that death would frustrate. *VDT* can also explain why virtue is not the only prudential good: your best self might want more than virtue. The extensional problems facing extant desire theories are also difficult to generate for *VDT*: the desires of a virtuous agent are normatively authoritative in a way that the desires of a merely informed agent are not.

The paper finishes by considering objections to *VDT*. Most pressingly, *VDT* seems to entail that something can be good for you even if you do not actually want that thing; this seems to alienate you from your own wellbeing. I argue that the possibility of alienation is actually a virtue of *VDT*, however. A deep attraction of eudaimonism is that it explains why vice is bad for us. *VDT* inherits this attraction: on *VDT*, vice is bad for you precisely because it alienates you from your own wellbeing. The further you stray from virtue, the less able you are to enjoy what your best self determines to be good for you.

*Design for Wellbeing in the Smart Home:
Reframing User Experience
Beyond Pragmatic Qualities*

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The growing presence of smart products in domestic environments is changing how we experience and think about the home. Within a smart home environment, everyday products and services constantly exchange data, automating routines and coordinating actions across devices and rooms.

Smart home products no longer behave like passive, isolated tools. They increasingly act in ecosystems as partners and co-agents, shaping routines and influencing users' sense of agency in subtle and significant ways (Kuijer & Giaccardi, 2018; Cila et al., 2017). Many connected products display a higher degree of autonomy compared to their traditional counterparts, and the digitalisation of interfaces becomes central to how people experience them. Overall, it can be said that what distinguishes interactions with such products is their agential shift, their digital dimension, and their ecosystem dimension.

Embedded in domestic life, these products enter the intimate dynamics of everyday routines. Their integration into the home needs to be evaluated beyond usability and functional qualities, extending to how experience is shaped and evolves over time, and considering how the layering of digital features impacts users' wellbeing and sense of agency.

Notably, UX models have been created that not only account for pragmatic qualities such as usability and efficiency, but also for hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions of experience (Hassenzahl & Tractinsky, 2006; Desmet & Pohlmeier, 2013). Research in design for wellbeing and positive computing shows that positive technology experiences are grounded in the satisfaction of core psychological needs – such as competence, relatedness, security, and stimulation (Hassenzahl et al., 2010) – as well as qualities related to autonomy, meaning, and long-term growth (Calvo & Peters, 2014). Pragmatic qualities often act as hygiene factors: necessary, but insufficient for creating positive or meaningful experiences (Hassenzahl et al., 2010; Lin et al., 2022).

This paper frames the agential, ecosystem, and digital shifts of smart home devices through a design-for-wellbeing perspective, arguing that considering product qualities across their pragmatic, hedonic, and eudaimonic dimensions provides a more suitable lens for interpreting what smart home technologies do to people and what people do with them. Building on this framework, the paper outlines three design principles for embedding wellbeing considerations into the design and evaluation of smart home products:

1. design for autonomy and competence: intelligent behaviours should support rather than override users' sense of control, helping users develop relevant skills and knowledge while preserving their agency over interactions (Peters et al., 2018; Sadeghian & Hassenzahl, 2023).
2. Attention to situated and relational wellbeing: design should promote interpersonal harmony and balance expectations among household members (Garg & Cui, 2022).
3. Frictionless and non-intrusive behaviour: digital interfaces and multimodality require attention to the complexity they introduce in the home environment, e.g. notifications can

disrupt concentration, and interface complexity can generate friction and frustration in everyday interactions.

By framing smart home products as active agents within domestic life and highlighting the complexity of the experiences they enable, this paper argues that a wellbeing-oriented approach to UX offers a stronger foundation for designing technologies that support human flourishing.

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On the Incommensurability of Virtue and Happiness: An Existentialist Challenge to Eudaimonistic Models of Well-Being

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In this paper, I employ existentialism to challenge the eudaimonist belief in the natural harmony between virtue, happiness, and flourishing, which holds that a flourishing life is one in which innate human faculties are perfected (virtues), generally resulting in feelings of pleasure and psychological well-being.

First, I briefly summarize ancient eudaimonistic models of human happiness and how those models have been adopted by modern psychological accounts of well-being. Stoicism holds that virtue is sufficient for flourishing and entails feelings of tranquility (ataraxia) and joy, whereas Aristotelianism holds that virtue plus external goods is sufficient for flourishing and likewise entails feelings of pleasure and happiness. This view is closely connected to the “unity of virtues” thesis, which holds that there is no essential conflict between the virtues, or between virtues and happiness. The modern psychology of well-being, which relies heavily on a eudaimonistic framework, generally avoids the inclusion of virtue but nevertheless likewise holds that flourishing entails the balanced satisfaction of objective and subjective desires, and maintains the centrality of happiness and positive affect in conceptualizations of well-being.

Second, I develop an existentialist challenge to these models based on the thought of Nietzsche and Camus, who argue that developing certain virtues may often be independent, or even diametrically opposed, to feelings of happiness. To be most fully human, they argue, we must cultivate authenticity and other virtues – full acceptance of the human condition in all its freedom, uncertainty, and finitude – but there is no guarantee that these virtues will bring about happiness. In fact, there is often an inverse correlation between the two in the existentialist tradition: generally the most happy and contented people are those riddled with vice. For example, Camus argues that there exists a stark choice between contented happiness based on the false illusion that life has some transcendent meaning and the epistemic virtue of “lucidity,” i.e., clear-eyed acceptance of our absurd condition. Likewise, Nietzsche argues that we are often happy insofar as we fool ourselves about our human condition, for instance by prematurely terminating intellectual investigations about reality as soon as we have satisfied our “metaphysical need” for certainty. For both Nietzsche and Camus, epistemic vices – such as dogmatism, close-mindedness, gullibility, and wishful thinking – serve as the foundation for many individuals’ sense of happiness, as they fulfill deep-seated psychological needs for comfort, certainty, and control. However, replacing these vices with virtues such as authenticity, open-mindedness, and skepticism often disrupts these illusions, which may instead lead to significant feelings of pain and suffering rather than positive affect.

By examining the tension between virtue and happiness, this paper challenges the assumption that flourishing, as understood within the existentialist tradition, can be equated solely with psychological well-being or positive affect. Existentialist thought urges scholars to reconsider the presumed harmony between virtue, happiness, and flourishing, emphasizing that

the cultivation of virtues may often come at the expense of subjective happiness.

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The Philosophical Practices as Exercises for the Human Flourishing

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In his peculiar interpretation of ancient Greek philosophy, the French thinker and philologist Pierre Hadot traces the origin of the philosophical discourse back to the discussion concerning a specific existential choice among the many possible. According to his reading, the philosophical discourse started as an explanation and justification for a the way of living, which was itself considered philosophical because devoted to transforming the self in a wise and virtuous manner. At the time, every philosophical school and every philosopher agreed that the purpose of human life was human flourishing – εὐδαιμονία, *eudaimonìa* – and a good life. However, to quote Aristotle, there was no concordance upon how to define ‘happiness’ or ‘good.’

1. In other words, for the Greeks, it was clear that the final purpose of human existence corresponds to a well-being that actually is a harmonious self-leading. But the word itself, εὐδαιμονία, also manifests the evidence that ancient Greek thinkers conceived the human being in terms of a composition, a unity of a multiplicity of elements – the δαίμων, *daímon*, is, in fact, a semi-divine figure. This is to say that, in order to reach the highest happiness, the human has to deal with that

which only human is not. Moreover, another aspect was important within the ancient philosophical discussion – an aspect that was strictly connected to human flourishing: in order to reach a happy status, it was crucial to develop habits and acquire virtuous behavior so as to consolidate one's character. Virtue – ἀρετή, *areté* – truly means 'excellence,' in the sense of a full expression of our proper human nature.

2. Hadot suggests that each philosophical school – Plato's Academy, Aristotle's Lyceum, Epicurus' Garden, and Zeno's Stoa – proposed specific exercises intended to convert the disciples in a wiser sense. Some of these practices were meant to strengthen the body, while other ones especially reinforced the inner attitude – although such a distinction is indeed evanescent since working on the body is a technique to influence the soul and vice versa. Among others, the practices included a certain diet, meditation, some activities of dialogue, the exercise of death, and preparation to sleep. Hadot traces a story of Western thought where he underlines the proposals of a few modern or contemporary philosophers whose work is actually in accordance with the Greek interpretation of philosophy as a way of living.

3. Some current thinkers, for example, Romano Màdera and Claudia Baracchi, take inspiration from Hadot's reading of ancient philosophy and suggest modalities in which nowadays philosophy can, again, be understood and experienced as a way to human flourishing. In my paper, I propose a synthesis of this original – and originary – manner of conceiving the philosophical work.

*Closed-mindedness
as an Epistemic Vice of Individuals*

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Closed-mindedness is an epistemic vice in individuals who dismiss sources and views that compete with their false beliefs – e.g., it is an epistemic vice in people like Donald Trump and members of the Klan. It can also be an epistemic vice in individuals who refuse to consider evidence against beliefs of theirs that are true but which they don't know – e.g., beliefs that Trump will, or won't, have a third term. This paper's task is to explain what makes closed-mindedness the epistemic vice that it so often is.

Rather than bake vice into the concept of closed-mindedness or assume that closed-mindedness is always an epistemic vice, it understands closed-mindedness itself to be a normatively neutral trait: an unwillingness, inability, or failure to engage seriously with relevant intellectual options, or an unwillingness or inability to revise one's beliefs. It argues that whether closed-mindedness is an epistemic vice will depend on the effects it produces and the motives and value-commitments that drive it.

Qualities that either produce a preponderance of bad epistemic effects, such as (e.g.) falsehoods, or prevent us from

achieving good epistemic effects, such as (e.g.) true beliefs and knowledge, comprise one kind of epistemic vice: they are effects-vices. Qualities that are driven by bad epistemic motives and values that (e.g.) prioritize the stability of one's belief-system over truth and knowledge comprise another kind of epistemic vice: they are motives-vices. Closed-mindedness can simultaneously be an effects-vice and a motives-vice.

The paper contends that the closed-mindedness of people like Trump and members of the Klan are at least effects-vices insofar as they produce a preponderance of bad epistemic effects, including (e.g.) the protection and maintenance of false beliefs, and the unjust dismissal of the credibility of other agents. The closed-mindedness of people who refuse to consider evidence against true beliefs (e.g., about a third term) that they don't know will also be an effects-vice when (e.g.) it results in misplaced confidence in those beliefs and hinders their progress toward knowledge. Insofar as the closed-mindedness of any of the aforementioned people is driven by (implicit) motives to (e.g.) protect their current belief-systems, or to value firmness and confidence in their beliefs over flexibility and following the evidence where it leads, it will also be a motives-vice.

Personal and Community Flourishing: Philosophy and Practice

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This proposal is situated in the groove of a philosophical tradition that considers the communitarian relationship constitutive of man and recognizes its true realization within cooperative contexts and practices¹ that, oriented toward a common good, form community (*koinonía*), while also considering the possible difficulties and problematic nature of the dynamic personal-community nexus².

This tradition, contrary to an abstractly individualistic and autonomistic view of man, starting from the recognition of some common original traits – such as need, dependence, vulnerability³ – thinks of “human flourishing” as the interweaving of the two inescapable personal and communal dimensions.

Cooperation, collaboration, gratitude, generosity, humility, trust, empathy, friendship, love: these are some of the relational and virtuous dimensions, collected by MacIntyre in the category of “virtues of the acknowledged dependence”⁴, that make people and communities flourish, and bestow and increase happiness.

The contribution is aimed at relating this philosophical tradition with the a concrete study case: that of the “Comunità di

Villa San Francesco” and “Cooperativa Sociale Onlus Arcobaleno ‘86” (Feltre, BL), two realities united and well rooted in the Italian territory. Referring to their inspiring educational sources⁵ and statutes, I propose to read their current experience and some testimonies of more than fifty years of history, in which people in conditions of initial or even structural difficulty, disability and physical, psychological, family, social and economic disadvantage, with the collaboration of a network of educators, volunteers and collaborators, build a common path of growth and redemption.

In this context, the orientation to the realization of a common good life and a horizon of hope is realized in the daily dimension of “doing good the good”, translating into cooperative practices (educational, work, artistic, religious, political), also open to the involvement of the broader social and political dimension (from local municipal relations, through those with territorial and national institutions, to international relations).

The people who experience this reality testify to both personal and communal “flowering”, concretely implemented in the realization of quality goods and services, through the responsible assumption of roles by each according to personal limits and possibilities.

The community plays an activating role both internally and externally, generating virtuous circles of growth in personal margins of effective autonomy, benefiting both personal psychological flourishing and well-being and community stability and growth, intertwining from which shared satisfaction and happiness can arise, for over-all.

Akrasia and the Fragility of Virtue: Knowing the Good Yet Failing to Act in Aristotle

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The concept of ἀκρασία (*akrasia*, weakness of will), a central theme of Aristotelian ethics, continues to elicit fundamental questions in contemporary philosophical reflection. In this presentation, I will contend that *akrasia* should not be regarded as a marginal exception or a mere cognitive failure. Instead, I will argue that it is a structural dimension of moral experience that has the capacity to reveal the inherent fragility of virtue. In particular, the present study will argue that the phenomenon of *akrasia* illuminates the constitutive tension between knowing and acting, between reason and desire, that runs through every path of moral formation. In particular, the focus will be on the Aristotelian distinction between the φρόνιμος (*phronimos*, the practical sage) and the ἀκρατικός (*akratikos*, one who acts against himself despite his own knowledge of the good).

This text aims to shed light on the concept of *phronesis* (practical wisdom) as an integrative disposition (*hexis*) that has the capacity to unify rational judgment, affects, and motives, thereby directing action towards human flourishing. This flourishing is understood in the Aristotelian sense as *eudaimonia*, which is defined as the optimal condition for human beings. However, the presence of *akrasia* indicates that this integration is inher-

ently fragile and never guaranteed. Cognizance of what is right does not necessarily imply the ability to accomplish it. The final discussion will center on the concept of *μαλακία* (*malakia*, fragility of character). This concept is understood as a disposition that, while not constituting a vice in its own right, has the capacity to impede the consistency of moral action.

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*Exploring the Mediating Role of Compassion
Satisfaction and Engagement in the
Relationship Between Growth and
Co-regulation Among Helping Professionals*

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Human flourishing has become a critical research topic throughout all areas of psychology, particularly among helping professionals who navigate complex interpersonal and emotional work settings (Grant & Kinman, 2015). Several studies pointed out that helping professions might be emotionally demanding due to the numerous work-related stressors these workers have to deal with related to their role and the organizational context (Coye et al., 2005; Van Heutgen, 2011). Thus, the present study aimed to investigate to what extent growth, compassion satisfaction, and engagement contribute to co-regulation, a key facet related to the ability to seek and reach social support (Salmela-Aro, 2009). Specifically, it aimed to investigate the indirect relationship between personal growth – defined as a broadened sense of self in which there is a balance between personal and other-oriented motivations (Baur & Wayment, 2008) – and co-regulation among colleagues at work, considering the mediating role of compassion satisfaction – defined as the pleasure derived from effectively helping others (Stamm, 2009), and work engagement. Participants were 262 helping professionals (76.3% females; Mage = 43.16, SD = 12.81) who were asked to complete an anonymous self-report question-

naire. A parallel mediation model was tested using IBM SPSS macro PROCESS 4.2 version (Hayes, 2018). Results revealed a significant positive indirect effect of growth on co-regulation via compassion satisfaction ($B = 1.06$; 95% CI $[0.583, 1.581]$) but not via engagement ($B = -0.03$; 95% CI $[-0.316, 0.289]$). These findings underscore the unique role of compassion satisfaction in facilitating co-regulation, suggesting that growth contributes to better social support dynamics by enhancing satisfaction in caregiving roles. This research paves the way for the possibility of developing and applying interventions aimed at promoting satisfaction in caregiving in order to enhance both individual and collective coping strategies, ultimately contributing to organizational resilience. Limitations and future research directions will be discussed.

Physical Health, Mental Health and the Meaning of Life

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To explore the relationship between physical health, mental health, and the meaning of life, I begin with a conception of the human being that emphasizes the close relationship between the body, the mind, and the innate drive to seek meaning in life. This unity becomes evident in psychosomatic illnesses. Each dimension of a person corresponds to a specific activity and a distinct type of pleasure: living, living well, understanding, loving and being loved. Pleasure naturally accompanies these activities and motivates us to pursue them, but seeking pleasure directly would be mistaken and counterproductive.

A person fully realizes themselves and achieves inner unity by directing their entire being – mind and body – toward the meaning of life. We sense that the true meaning of our existence is not something we invent – perhaps to overcome boredom – but something we discover. This purpose, often only a vague ideal, is perceived metaphorically as something “above oneself”. It might align with ideals or realities that transcend the individual and give life its purpose – such as justice, truth, science, beauty, community and God. Yet it can also be symbolically embodied in particular objects and, most importantly, in individual people. Therefore, the focus should not be

primarily on oneself and still less on what lies “beneath oneself” – the realm of mere physical health. This inward or downward focus risks fragmenting the self. The human being becomes integrated and unified through an upward orientation toward meaning. Yet, it is also possible to consciously influence this dynamic from the top down – through physical exercise, engagement with the unconscious, and, when necessary, even through psychotropic medications. This can create space for the person’s free spiritual maturation.

It is essential to wisely balance physical health (*salus*) and spiritual salvation (*soteria tou biou* – *salus*), which concerns life’s deeper purpose. Priority should be given to the latter without neglecting the former in the journey of personal development. In practice, those who sincerely strive for spiritual fulfillment generally do not neglect their physical well-being and certain carefully chosen experiences of pleasure.

Awareness of the need to strengthen one’s physical and mental health – even through medication – is itself a sign of health and orientation toward life’s meaning. Conversely, prioritizing the preservation of one’s body or physical health fragments the individual, rather than unifying them. This is because the body serves the mind, and the mind serves something beyond itself. Likewise, focusing solely on the mind (the self) and spiritual health – according to a rigid ideal of individual authenticity – cannot fully provide life with meaning. The mind is inherently intentional, aimed at seeking and affirming life’s meaning. Here, too, the risk is self-fragmentation, loss of life’s meaning, and nihilism.

On this path toward life’s meaning, good friends are fundamental, as they help one maintain a balanced focus. In this sense, solitude and individualism are afflictions that prevent one from truly becoming oneself and from attaining health.

Nietzsche on Human Flourishing, Well-being, and Virtue

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The studies on Nietzsche's moral psychology deal with his notion of virtue. Grossly summarising, in Nietzsche's eyes agency begins with "drives" (*Triebe*), which are marshalled into "instincts" (*Instinkten*), though sometimes the distinction between the two is not clear. Only later come human types, which eventually give birth to virtues. As different people embody different drives, so virtues differ from person to person: for instance, Nietzsche personally deems curiosity, courage, pathos of distance, sense of humour, and solitude as essential virtues (Alfano 2016).

However, these studies focus either on the consequences of such philosophical structure on the human self and the notions of agency, freedom, and responsibility (Katsafanas 2016), or on the nature of values and their anti-realist epistemological nature (Leiter 2019), while they reserve little attention to the notions of human flourishing and well-being, which Nietzsche himself seems to discard. For instance, his high consideration for pessimism of the tragic sort from his early works implies a refusal of the very notion of well-being. Indeed, in many passages he states that life itself is not important, what matters being only "the eternal vitality (*die ewige Lebendigkeit*)"

(HH 129), while thorough his entire production he condemns as nihilistic the improvement of material conditions of life (in which he includes also psychological well-being) as a value, a scope or a “human right” (i.e. GS 347, BGE 44 etc.). On the contrary, Nietzsche values and praises “danger” (or a “dangerous life”: M 295, GS 347 etc.) and heroism as goals worth to be pursued and opposed to eudemonistic philosophies (NF 1883, 7/38).

As for the term eudamonia, in its few appearances it always conveys a negative meaning, and Nietzsche sometimes even uses it as synonymous with nihilism (“the feeling of the loss of meaning of everything”: NF 1888, 13/2). Yet, to fully appreciate Nietzsche’s stance on well-being and human flourishing, existing studies on Nietzsche’s moral psychology should be enriched with the account of Nietzsche’s early opposition to Aristotle, in which his fundamental critique of morals is rooted. My point is that Nietzsche criticises Aristotle by constantly dialoguing with him, as witnessed by his moral vocabulary – virtue, character... – which is essentially Aristotelian and not modern. Morality always presupposes art, both in the origin of the subject (which differentiates itself as real from the fictional characters on stage) and the possibility for it to know and unify reality in a representation (which provides autonomy as the foundation for its freedom to act: Vernant & Vidal-Nacquet 1972).

Nietzsche sees subjectivity as the world’s self-expression (or, in other words, the world is the only existing subject), which means virtues are less the product of human behaviour than the self-manifestation and self-expression of the world. Therefore, there is no such thing as *human* flourishing, detached from the flourishing of *the world as a whole* – a valuable teaching for the Anthropocene age. By re-actualising tragedy, Nietzsche defines virtue as anti-virtue, consisting in constantly

trespassing norms while, at the same time, normalising such trespassing, so that such state may become liveable and not hostile to life. This, for him, is the meaning of *art*, which he famously defines as “giving style to one’s character” by following “a single taste” (GS 290).

Flourishing between Moral Transhumanism and Virtue Ethics

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In this paper, I aim to explore the conceptual differences between the understanding of moral flourishing proposed by virtue ethics and that advocated by moral transhumanism. Both philosophical perspectives can, at least in some accounts, share the ultimate goal of achieving happiness, well-being or, more broadly, what can be defined as ‘moral flourishing’, thus adopting a eudaimonic stance. However, the two approaches differ significantly in the methods they propose for achieving this goal.

For most proponents of virtue ethics, moral flourishing is achieved through the cultivation of virtues and *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, which enables individuals to fully realise their human potential. In contrast, transhumanists such as Nick Bostrom or Natasha Vita More see neurotechnology and pharmacology as key tools for self-improvement, indispensable means for overcoming biological limitations and reaching new levels of well-being, as well as moral growth.

In order to determine which of these perspectives better captures the true nature of moral flourishing, this paper is divided into two sections. In the first, I will compare the two proposed paths to flourishing, focusing in particular on the means they

employ and the ethical issues they raise. In the second, I will argue that virtue ethics offers the most comprehensive and coherent approach to achieving moral flourishing because it places the person, in their totality and integrity, at the centre of the moral process. In contrast, transhumanism often reduces morality to the management of emotions, ultimately falling into a form of ‘emotivism’ that fails to grasp the complexity and depth of moral experience.

In conclusion, I will argue that moral flourishing, understood as the full realisation of the self, can only be properly understood and pursued within an ethical framework that values human character in its entirety.

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The Effects of 3D-Built Virtual Arctic Environment in Improving Vigor through Connectedness: An Experimental Study with Older People in Care Facilities

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The steady increase in life expectancy has led to a growing population of older adults living in care facilities (Regnier, 2008). However, staying in these facilities can exacerbate feelings of isolation and detrimentally impact mental and physical health, often leading to a decrease in vigor.

Vigor, along with other positive feelings, has a health-protecting physiological effect, such as modulating the automatic reactivity related to the effects of negative emotions (Fredrickson, 1998; Shirom, 2011), as much as that it is defined as the physical and cognitive energy essential to overall well-being (Stathi et al., 2002). One key factor positively associated with subjective well-being is the self-transcendent process of connectedness (Reed et al., 2021). Previous research showed that nature exposure in older adults enhances perceived well-being and strengthens connectedness with loved ones and the whole community (Finlay et al., 2015).

However, many facilities lack natural areas or offer limited access, limiting the possibility of benefiting from nature's exposure. In this context, VR can provide older adults with a practical, accessible, and low-cost alternative to experience the benefits of nature virtually when real-life access is not possible.

Considering recent findings that highlighted the role of exposure to solid water environments in promoting positive psychological outcomes (Li et al., 2023; Theodorou et al., 2023), the present study aims to assess the effectiveness of the exposure to a 3D-built virtual arctic natural environment, compared to a 3D-built virtual urban environment, in promoting connectedness and vigor among older adults in care facilities. Fifty-three older adults ($M_{\text{age}} = 83.8$; $SD = 7.73$), distributed between two care facilities, participated in the study. Twenty-eight participants were randomly assigned to the 3D-built virtual arctic condition, and twenty-five were randomly assigned to the 3D-built virtual urban condition.

Results showed that the 3D-built virtual arctic environment significantly enhanced feelings of connectedness, which in turn enhanced vigor. These findings support the integration of immersive virtual environments as a tool to foster eudaimonic flourishing, particularly in settings with limited access to natural spaces (Gaggioli et al., 2016). They also underscore the value of connectedness as a pathway to psychological resilience and vitality (Julien et al., 2024).

This research aligns with Aristotelian and psychological perspectives on flourishing by showing the restorative potential of transcendent experiences in virtual nature (Pratscher, 2020). Implications include cost-effective strategies for improving well-being and fostering virtues like social connectedness in older adults (Byerly, 2024; Machiels, 2024; Welie & Rule, 2006).

Flourishing Through Fiction: How Literature Can Inform Philosophical and Psychological Conceptions of the Good Life

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Harvard University's Human Flourishing Program lists five central domains for evaluating human flourishing: 1. happiness and life satisfaction, 2. physical and mental health, 3. meaning and purpose, 4. character and virtue, 5. close social relationships (VanderWeele, 2017).

There is no doubt that these are fundamental aspects of a life well lived. In the early months of the global pandemic, however, each of these facets of flourishing was upended. Depression, anxiety, and discontent were rampant. We were discouraged from leaving our homes and told to put our physical and mental well-being on pause. Our lives were adrift, with no clear path forward and no certainty about the future. We were cut off from our communities and our ability to express our various talents and virtues were severely inhibited. In the midst of such peril, hope easily gives way to despair and the belief that one can live a rich, fulfilling life wanes.

What is one to do? For Aristotle, it is at just such moments of moral and existential opacity that one needs exemplars who can model how to live – and perhaps even flourish – through crises. At the best of times, these role models will be found in our families, workplaces, churches, and local communities;

they will be those who show us that justice is a fundamentally other-oriented virtue (NE, 1129b) and that the good life cannot be fully attained if one is not willing to direct one's actions toward "what is of advantage to others" (NE, 1130a).

In times of anxiety, despair, and isolation, however, we may need to seek them in history, literature, and works of art. There we often meet individuals who underwent trials that resonate with our own, those who bore the slings of fortune with perseverance and grace. In his recent letter on the literary imagination and spiritual formation, Pope Francis (2024) draws our attention to "the value of reading novels and poems as part of one's path to personal maturity."

Emphasizing literature's ability to "open up new interior spaces," to free us from "our present unremitting exposure to social media, mobile phones, and other devices," Francis insists that reading "helps us to avoid becoming trapped by a few obsessive thoughts that can stand in the way of our personal growth." It does so by reminding us that life as we experience it today is not the totality of existence, that circumstances change and that those who have cultivated resilient characters can – and often do – live meaningful lives even in the most harrowing of situations. More than that, it allows us to transcend ourselves, to lose ourselves in a good book and find therein lessons on the art of living from those who have thought deeply about what it means to live well.

This paper – authored by a philosopher who works at a Center for psychological humanities and teaches continuing education courses for practicing psychotherapists – will reflect upon these insights and the role literature can play in shaping our understanding of human flourishing.

A Humanistic Approach to Teaching Resilience

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‘Resilience’ has become a buzzword in higher education in the face of concerns about rising mental health problems amongst students. In response, over the past decades, universities have implemented resilience programs in order to help students to cope with adversity.

These programs, such as the Penn PERMA-workshops, have been influenced by positive psychology (Seligman, 2011), and seek to equip individuals with a set of cognitive and practical skills that increase mental well-being. However, the psychological framework is not without its critics. The psychological definition of resilience as “mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility” in the face of adversity (<https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience>) tends to ignore an ethical core of resilience (Kristjánsson, 2013). Furthermore, the psychological approach tends to ignore humanistic sources that may enrich psychological concepts (Freeman, 2024), such as resilience.

At our institute of higher education, we share the concerns about students’ mental health. In developing the course “Health, Resilience, and Human Flourishing,” instead of working indiscriminately within the positive psychology approach, we used interdisciplinarity as a way to nuance and problematize the con-

cept of resilience. The course consists of four weeks of daily three-hour classes taught by a physician, biologist, philosopher, and sociologist. The third week involved a personal purpose workshop (Banda et al., 2023), a close reading of Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* (2004), and a close reading of Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. The premise of this week is that people who experience a sense of personal purpose and meaning in life tend to do better in times of stress, and have a greater ability to bounce back from trauma (Southwick & Charney, 2018). Furthermore, the premise of this week is that story-telling – whether autobiographical as in the case of Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*, or fictional as in the case of Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* – is conducive to emotional as well as cognitive engagement with the question of how people deal with adversity.

In developing the course, one of the questions was how – without becoming their personal therapists – can we help students develop resilience as a good character trait by sharing stories and reflecting on personal purpose?

The current paper presents the first quantitative findings. These findings are based on a pre- and post-survey questionnaire that is a composite of four validated scales from published sources, namely, the Brief Resilience Scale, the Claremont Personal Purpose Scale, the Virtuous Intellectual Character Scale, and the brief Social Desirability Scale. The findings are based on $N = 45$. We apply a paired T-test analysis. The pilot-study is currently underway. Our focus is on trying to uncover whether the interdisciplinary approach to teaching resilience, including humanistic sources, provides students, firstly, with a way of understanding resilience that may be more holistic compared to the standard psychological approach. Secondly, we are testing to see whether students grow in resilience and a sense of purpose on account of the experiences offered in the course.

Deconstructing Phenomenological and Neurocognitive Basis of Psychological Well-Being through Psychedelics

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The complexity of human experience makes psychological well-being a central topic across multiple disciplines. Psychology emphasizes individual needs and mental states, while philosophy often adopts a broader perspective, focusing on human flourishing and the fulfillment of potential, as exemplified by the Greek notion of *eudaimonia*.

This study seeks to disentangle this complexity by identifying core elements that provide a foundational framework for understanding psychological well-being. It defines well-being as a category encompassing complex experiential dynamics within the subject-world relationship. Using insights from psychedelic research, the study integrates phenomenological analyses of transformative psychological experiences with neurocognitive explanations of underlying brain mechanisms. Specifically, it argues that each level of analysis plays a distinct role: phenomenology uncovers the descriptive dimensions of experience, while neurocognitive models offer mechanistic explanations of how these experiences are sustained and organized.

Psychedelic therapies that induce profound psychological transformations highlight two key constructs: *belief transformation*

and *emotional regulation*, both deeply intertwined with enduring psychological changes predictive of long-term well-being. These processes unfold over time, during sustained interactions between the subject and its lifeworld. Psychological well-being, from this perspective, depends not on isolated beliefs or fleeting emotions occurring during psychedelic trips, but on how self-related information is organized into meaningful, temporally-extended experiences.

For those experiences to take place, affects must play a foundational role in shaping engagement with the world, influencing how beliefs are acquired and retrieved. Conversely, beliefs guide top-down processes that shape affective responses to engage with various individual or social scenario. By disentangling some fundamental structures and dynamics of the phenomenological nexus underlying meaningful personal experiences, this study identifies trajectories that may sustain or disrupt psychological well-being.

To advance this understanding, phenomenological insights must be paired with neurocognitive models that decompose these capacities into functions and map them onto brain mechanisms. For instance, psychedelic trials focusing on the monoaminergic system highlight its role in regulating the synaptic weights of those networks that dynamically modulate affective engagement required to face challenging personal and social scenarios. Then, studies on brain networks sustaining the elaboration of self-related information also suggest potential routes to build forward mutual correlations with phenomenological analyses. By integrating these perspectives, the study reframes psychological well-being as the by-product of a series of dynamic life-long processes rather than a static state. It proposes an epistemological framework where personal and collective beliefs align with emotional regulation to generate meaningful experiences that may led to flourishing and fulfillment.

The ProBen Project – Symposium

Anna Contardi

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Psychophysical well-being is a critical determinant of learning, motivation, and personal growth during the university years. Research highlights that well-being is not characterized by the absence of distress but by the reinforcement of personal and contextual resources that, in turn, foster resilience and adaptive functioning. Moreover, students increasingly face challenges – such as relational difficulties, uncertainty about academic and professional prospects, and the pervasive influence of behavioral and digital addictions – that threaten this equilibrium.

The contributions included in this symposium provide an integrated perspective that connects theory, empirical evidence, and practical application. They offer an evidence-informed framework for promoting inclusive university practices and designing targeted interventions to support both student well-being and academic success.

The international perspective offers interesting insights into the different methodologies used in the context of university psychological counseling: – a theoretical analysis of how cultural and social factors influence the quality of the therapeutic relationship within counseling contexts; – a comprehensive profile of students well-being and academic engagement

(focus on the risks associated with behavioral and digital addictions) at European University of Rome; – an evaluation of the effectiveness of psychological counseling programs in promoting mental health outcomes at European University of Rome; – overview of the personal strengths-based narrative therapy model applied in the context of undergraduate psychological counseling at Loyola University of Seville.

The Symposium comprises three papers – all offered by teams belonging to the European University of Rome –, focusing on the research steps developed by the ProBen project in the clinical area.

1. Exploring University Students' Well-Being: Psychological Functioning, Addiction Behaviors, and Academic Engagement (Federica Genova, Martina Pansini, Noemi Botticelli, Dorotea Cicconcelli, Giulia D'Ari, Anna Con-tardi & Marco Innamorati)

This study, part of the national PRO-BEN Project, investigates university students' well-being, technology-related behaviors, and academic engagement. While digital technologies offer opportunities for connection and learning, their excessive use – particularly of smartphones and social media – may compromise mental health and academic performance. A sample of Italian students from the European University of Rome participated in this research, which aims to provide a view of students' psychological well-being, levels of academic engagement, and vulnerability to digital addictions. Findings are intended to support targeted interventions to foster healthier digital habits, promote student well-being, and enhance the quality of academic life.

2. Preliminary Findings of an Intervention Model for the Promotion of University Students' Psychological Well-Being (Martina Pansini, Dorotea Cicconcelli, Giulia D'Ari, Noemi Botticelli, Anna Contardi, Marco Innamorati & Federica Genova)

This study presents preliminary findings from the PRO-BEN Project, a broader national project promoting youth psychophysical wellbeing based on the I-COPPE model, which includes six dimensions: interpersonal, psychological, physical, community, employment, and economic. We evaluated the effectiveness of a university counseling intervention involving Italian students at the European University of Rome. Participants were assessed pre- and post-intervention using the Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation – Outcome Measure (CORE-OM), the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire – Italian Version (ERQ-I), and the Mentalization Questionnaire (MMQ). This study aims to further demonstrate the effectiveness of counseling interventions in enhancing students' mental health and stress management.

3. A Systematic Review of the Impact of Cultural Influences, Age, Socioeconomic Status, and Gender Differences on Therapeutic Relationships and Treatment Outcomes in Counseling Psychology (Martina Pansini, Giulia D'Ari, Noemi Botticelli, Dorotea Cicconcelli, Federica Genova, Marco Innamorati & Anna Contardi)

The therapeutic relationship between the client and counselor is pivotal to treatment success. This study explores how cultural background, age, socioeconomic status, and gender influence the therapeutic relationship in psychological counsel-

ing. These factors shape communication styles, expectations, and commitment to therapy, ultimately influencing treatment outcomes. Understanding their impact is critical to creating more inclusive and effective counseling. A systematic review was conducted following PRISMA guidelines, including studies using qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods retrieved from databases. The review aims to offer a nuanced understanding of how social and cultural variables influence therapeutic relationships and inform more personalized counseling practices.

The Symposium also hosted an international contribution which properly framed the articulation of the previous studies and perspectives.

4. Building More Satisfying Identities: Reinventing Ourselves in the Face of Adversity (José María Rodríguez de Castro – Loyola University of Seville, Spain)

The narrative metaphor applied in psychotherapy proposes conversation as a tool for change: personal transformation as the result of “telling ourselves” a different, more useful, effective, and fulfilling story in response to problem contexts. Strategies are presented to help generate richer personal descriptions, enabling individuals to reflect on their values, competencies, and identity strengths when facing challenges. Various perspectives are integrated, including solution-focused therapy, brief strategic therapy, and Michael White’s narrative therapy. In this regard, insights will be presented from the context of the Psychology Clinic at Loyola University, Seville.

Near-flourishing and the Disadvantaged

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The nature and pursuit of flourishing have been the focus of much VE thinking. However, concentrating overmuch upon this has downsides. First, focusing on the choices of individuals backgrounds the need for social action aimed at providing the necessary conditions of a flourishing life to all. Second, this focus excludes (indeed, erases) *the disadvantaged* – those people who have approximately no shot at leading a flourishing life. By contrast, this paper will focus on the disadvantaged.

Aristotle divides people into (a) his well-off target audience who have reasonable shot at flourishing, and (b) the disadvantaged (diseased, enslaved, impoverished, or ill-raised people) who have at most a tiny chance of flourishing because they cannot acquire sufficient instrumental goods of fortune to exercise the virtues, acquire crucial intrinsic goods of fortune, or lead complete lives.

A person can be privileged in some respects while being disadvantaged in others. Agents are *disadvantaged with respect to a good of fortune, G*, if they have only a tiny chance to acquire G, or they have only a tiny chance to flourish without G. If an agent is disadvantaged with respect to some G, then the agent has only a tiny chance of leading a flourishing life, and

so is *disadvantaged simpliciter*. Since many people lack some G, many people are disadvantaged.

When flourishing lives are almost off the table, for what should the disadvantaged strive? The next best thing to the flourishing life is a life of marginal unhappiness. Often, the disadvantaged have a reasonable chance of achieving such a *near-flourishing life*. Near-flourishing is not just the last stop on the way to flourishing. Instead, flourishing and near-flourishing lie at the endpoints of rather different development paths. I maintain that the disadvantaged should pursue near-flourishing rather than quixotically striving for flourishing.

Most disadvantages consist in the unavailability of crucial goods of fortune. To each crucial good of fortune, there corresponds a different sort of near-flourishing life. Oft-mentioned goods of fortune include friends, wealth, political power, leisure, health, good birth, good children, and good looks. One sort of social progress consists in identifying goods of fortune over-and-above this standard list so that we can work to expand the availability of these underappreciated goods. This paper identifies several non-standard goods of fortune, and sketches corresponding near-flourishing lives that constitute the best available goals for people disadvantaged by the lack of those goods.

An important sort of disadvantage is the lack of goods of fortune necessary for the development and exercise of virtue. For example, people stranded for the foreseeable future in food deserts may be unable to develop temperance-with-respect-to-food for lack of opportunity to practice. These people should opt for a sort of near-flourishing life built around the exercise of all but one of the virtues. Other people's faculties are impaired through no fault of their own. Their perceptions, passions, reason, etc. respond to situations in ways that lie near, but not quite in the mean. They must opt for a sort

of near-flourishing life built around the exercise of character traits that are *near-virtues*.

Overall, my paper offers a VE account of the disadvantaged, identifies a smattering of non-standard goods of fortune, and recommends lives of near-flourishing to people disadvantaged by the lack of these goods.

The Normativity of Phronesis

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Practical wisdom (*phronesis*) is irreducibly normative: it concerns what one ought to do and cannot be reduced to descriptive psychological facts. This paper defends the normativity of *phronesis* against naturalistic reduction through the Normativity Argument: any attempt to translate practical wisdom into purely descriptive terms either reintroduces normativity at a later stage or fails to capture its distinctive reason-giving force. Accordingly, *phronesis* cannot be identified with, or exhausted by, empirical regularities in cognition, affect, or behavior (De Caro, Navarini, & Vaccarezza, 2024).

At the same time, the Aretai Model offers a framework that preserves normativity while engaging constructively with empirical research. It identifies four enabling features of practical wisdom – moral perception, moral deliberation, emotion regulation, and moral motivation – which exhibit a hybrid status (De Caro et al., 2025). These features link first-nature capacities (biological and psychological dispositions) with second-nature reasons (normatively structured forms of understanding and evaluation). In this sense, they provide the conditions under which agents can appropriately respond to morally salient aspects of situations.

Crucially, these enabling features are only partially accessible to empirical investigation. Their psychological correlates may be measured, operationalized, and trained to some extent; however, *phronesis* itself remains irreducibly evaluative. It is not quantifiable but assessable in terms of the appropriateness of judgment and action. The relation between *phronesis* and its enabling features is best understood as one of supervenience: no difference in practical wisdom can occur without a corresponding difference in these underlying capacities, yet high levels of such capacities do not guarantee wise action. Phenomena such as akrasia illustrate that agents may possess well-developed cognitive and affective dispositions while still failing to act in accordance with sound judgment.

The Aretai Model thus provides a theoretically parsimonious account that avoids both reductive naturalism and dualistic separation. It allows for a meaningful dialogue between normative ethics and moral psychology while maintaining the primacy of reason-giving evaluation. This framework has important implications for both philosophical inquiry and empirical research on moral agency.

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*These Things We Trust: Risks and Benefits
of Instrumental and Emotional Trust in Social
Robotics for Human Well-being*

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Recent developments in affective AI and social robotics have paved the way to new types of artificial agents, designed to perform tasks focused on interacting with humans and presenting themselves as credible social actors. Human-robot interaction (HRI) studies focus on how to make such interactions more natural and friendly, and the notion of trust often play a prominent role among strategies aimed at making individuals feel more comfortable in sharing their personal and professional space with affective AI and robots. Social and psychological studies have emphasised the importance of trust in improving personal well-being and society's flourishing but have also pointed out that different models and definitions of trusts can be identified. This research seeks to investigate how trust in human-robot relations differs from trust in human-human relations, to address the potentially misleading or deceptive aspects it may involve, and to question its role in the actual well-being of individuals and communities. Specifically, we may distinguish between instrumental (or task-based) trust and emotional (or relationship-based) trust.

The trust we place in technological artifacts usually focuses on their ability to perform their designed task safely, pre-

dictably and effectively, and can be better understood as reliability. Emotional trust is typical of human interpersonal relationships, being grounded in elements such as reciprocal affection, shared experiences, common values, and empathy. This also implies that while human-to-human trust is consistent with some degree of uncertainty, vulnerability and opacity, human-to-robot trust needs to be built on transparency and information disclosure, to ensure the performance is reliable and safe. However, in social robots and affective AI these two types of trust seem to coexist. HRI experimental studies suggest that human cognitive mechanisms, such as anthropomorphism, lead individuals to apply the same rules and inferences to human-robot interaction as they do to human-human interactions, ascribing meaning and intentions to artificial agents' behaviour. Emotional trust is, therefore, elicited by social robots' ability to mimic human behaviour, by a façade which is not the representation of internal beliefs or intentions.

The human tendency to trust social robots, despite them presenting as something they are not, may risk making trust a way to conceal malign purposes or unwanted outcomes. Yet, to forgo the social features that trigger such trust is to forgo the essential features for the potential beneficial applications of social robots and, ultimately, for social robots altogether. Thus, how can we account for this inherent tension so that human-to-(social)robot trust contributes to both individual and social well-being?

Phronesis, Logic, Psychology

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Neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism, especially in its Footian (2001) and Thompsonian (2008) version, holds that judgements about goodness and evil in human beings are species of judgements of natural goodness and defect in living things. On this reading, virtues and vices are perfective or defective states of natural human powers. This naturalism is not of the empiricist sort which is most common in contemporary analytic production.

As Thompson makes it clear, it is rather a sort of *logical* naturalism, which focuses on elucidating the role of the predicates ‘good’ and ‘evil’ in the forms of judgements we use, arguing that there is a special sense of them when we are talking about living things: an attributive (internal) sense rather than a predicative (external) sense. This is a point which was made long ago by Ludwig Wittgenstein and Peter Geach. And according to Foot, there is then a special sense of this special sense of goodness in the case of human beings: human goodness is natural goodness of a living species (the human species), but it is primarily goodness of our rational faculties, not goodness of our survival and reproductive capacities like in other animals. This is the sort of naturalism G.E.M. Anscombe alluded to in

the final paragraphs of *Modern Moral Philosophy* when she was urging for a reconstruction of a ‘philosophical psychology’ of an Aristotelian sort.

This naturalism raises two sorts of questions: if goodness is perfection of our rational faculties, does it mean goodness would be the same for other intelligent species, like rational wolves or rational Martians? This would seem to jeopardise the whole naturalistic project because it would show that ethical reasoning and concepts really does depend in the end on the concept of a rational being rather than on any naturalistic ones like ‘human species’ or ‘life form’. ‘Human’ would be a mere empirical concept, as Kant famously contended. The second question is about the place of empirical study within ethical naturalism: what sort of faculties are perfected with the virtues and what role does empirical science play in picking them out?

I will answer the first question through Thompson’s distinction between life-form-relative practical reasoning and speculative reasoning, which follows from Frege’s distinction between psychologistic logic and logic *tout court*. I will answer the second question through a quick foray into Neo-Aristotelian philosophy of nature. Following Lockhart and Lott (2023), I will argue that our knowledge of life forms, functions, and relevant capacities (all essential to the formulation of the ethical naturalistic project) are already at work within the scientific method itself and is not a philosophical imperialist intervention from the outside. And following Anscombe and Thompson, I will show that our philosophical-psychological concepts are inextricably linked to a grasp of our own life form, and that this grasp cannot be reached by the empirical methods used in current psychology.

Just like biology presupposes a certain tacit knowledge of life forms of the species it describes, psychology presupposes a tacit philosophical-psychological understanding of its subject matter.

*Promoting Sustainable Wellbeing for Young
People Through Virtue-based Sexuality
Education for Family Formation:
The Case of Latvia.*

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Strong families are fundamental for sustainable personal and societal wellbeing. The Latvian Constitution highlights family protection, but challenges like high divorce rates, single-parent families, and low birth rates are threatening the sustainability of the country and citizens' wellbeing, which makes education for family formation particularly relevant. Relatedly, young people's extensive use of media, which makes large amounts of inappropriate sexual content easily accessible to them, has contributed to the global moral crisis, which makes it particularly urgent to provide young people with a research-based approach to sexuality education based on family values and moral virtues.

The aim of this study is to explore understandings of and the need for virtue-based sexuality education for family formation (SE4FF) in the Latvian education system. The research questions guiding the inquiry were: What is the current understanding of parents, teachers and student teachers about virtue-based sexuality education? What are the priorities for implementing sexuality education for family formation at school? What are the main needs and best practices in this field according to participants?

To answer the research questions, the study adopted a survey design with mixed methods. A questionnaire with open-ended and Likert-scale questions was elaborated in the fall of 2024 and it was administered in May 2025 to 1198 participants (parents: 48%; teachers: 17%; parents who are teachers: 20%; students: 15%). The results show that only 31% of respondents considered UNESCO comprehensive sexuality education approach as suitable or very suitable, while 50% rated so the virtue-based approach, 62% the physiology approach, and 67% the holistic love approach. 75% of respondents supported parents' and school collaboration in this field. Only 10% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that only UNESCO's approach should be used in teacher education, while 50% believed that education should offer a range of alternative approaches to sexuality education.

The results of the study will be part of a report on policy recommendations about virtue-based sexuality education for family formation and will serve for further conceptualization of a school program on SE4FF. The research was funded by the Recovery and Resilience Facility project "Internal and external consolidation of the University of Latvia" (No.5.2.1.1.i.0/2/24/I/CFLA/007), grant "Strengthening values-based family literacy and sexuality education in the Latvian education system" No. LU-BA-PA-2024/1-0011.

In Defense of a Platonic Conception of Well-Being

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“Does everyone want to do well (*eu prattein*)? Or isn’t that the sort of question that I was just now afraid would be ridiculous? For I suppose this is the sort of question that is stupid to ask. I mean, who doesn’t want to do well?” “No one,” replied Cleinias. “Well then,” I [Socrates] said, “the next question, given that we want to do well, is how we might do well: If we had many good things? Or is this an even sillier question than before? I mean, this too is indisputably so, I suppose.” “He agreed.” (Plato, *Euthydemus*, 278e-279a) Socrates goes on to list a number of items that are commonly thought to be good things – wealth, health, good looks, good birth, talents, and honor (279b).

In most of Plato’s dialogues, the character Socrates disputes the unconditional value of many of these supposed goods. Through the research done by historians like Herodotus, Plato learned that members of different cultures held different views about the actions and possessions that are most valuable. Today, we are even more aware of the diversity of views about the conditions and actions that contribute to human well-being and of the devastating results that might occur when the members of one culture attempt to impose their values on

others even when they had the best of intentions. Should we then conclude that there is no psychologically or culturally independent fact of the matter about how we might live our best lives, and so, we should never attempt as an individual or as a representative of a social organization to persuade or enforce a value on an individual who has a different view? That conclusion doesn't seem right either.

When reflecting on our own individual case, we don't think that matters of welfare are subjective or culturally dependent. We are often disappointed with the results of the actions that our cultural influencers (family, friends, polis, nation, corporations, the latest TikTok sensations) who promised that if we acted as they proposed, we would be well off. Indeed, to the extent that we are offered the opportunity to learn about them, we are often attracted to the values of cultures that are not our own. We believe that there is a moral difference between those actions and cultural norms that help and harm human beings, and we want to be able to explain and justify to ourselves and to others what that difference is. Experiences and reflections such as these have motivated serious philosophical inquiry into the nature of human well-being, with the hope that such inquiry would yield a theory that would explain and justify our most widely and strongly held views, as well as help us to decide on a rational basis cases of serious dispute.

After a short review of the strengths and weaknesses of the leading philosophical and psychological accounts of well-being in the Western philosophical tradition, I argue in support of a conception of well-being that few have taken seriously. In the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle reports, somewhat derisively, that Plato identified the Good with the One (to hen; 1218a20; see also *Meta.* 988a8-16, b10-15). Following classic Aristotelian methodology, I argue that Plato is right. The view that well-being is a matter of being one rather than many conflict-

ing forces tied together (what I will refer to as “wholeness and unity”) helps us to make sense of the strengths of the leading philosophical and psychological accounts of well-being as well as to avoid their weaknesses.

Because, as humans, we are essentially creatures with a subjective life, the question of what makes us whole and unified demands that we recognize the importance of positive subjective attraction and delight in any adequate theory of well-being. Because, as humans, we are biological creatures whose wholeness and unity depends on actions that affect our physical health, we cannot reduce our wellbeing to how we feel or believe about how we are doing; we must consider how our actions affect our physical health (understood as the harmonious functioning of all of the systems that constitute our body). Because, as humans, we are members of a species that has evolved to benefit from and depend upon social cooperation, our welfare as whole and unified creatures depends crucially on our ability to win the willing cooperation of our fellow human beings, which, in turn, requires us to develop those dispositions of character that we usually have in mind when we think of the moral virtues.

But because, as individuals, each of us is unique in our psychological and bodily attributes – including those attributes are the result of our own brain and bodily physiology, and our own peculiar socialization and social circumstances on which our own welfare depends –, the goods and activities that will be good for you will not necessarily be good for me.

Nonetheless, despite the fact that for each of us there is a different answer to the question of what is best for us, there is nonetheless an objectively right answer to the general philosophical question. What is well-being? It is a matter of wholeness and unity, i.e., the harmonious functioning of all of our psychological and physical parts. What counts as good for a

person? It is that object or action that contributes maximally to the harmonious functioning of all of that person's psychological and physical parts.

*Freedom and the Hermeneutics of Desire
between Human Flourishing
and Psychological Well-Being*

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I argue that a good hermeneutics of desire is crucial in the exercise of freedom and constitutes an essential condition for achieving human flourishing. Today, there is a widespread confusion between freedom of action and the pursuit of desires reduced to momentary whims. In this context, freedom is not only considered an unquestionable value, but also seen as a self-poietic force capable of creating meaning against the backdrop of a meaningless world. Within this framework, any desire is considered good insofar as it expresses individual freedom, regardless of its content or purpose. In dialogue with different philosophical perspectives – particularly those of J.-P. Sartre, C. Taylor, A. MacIntyre and H. Frankfurt – I will contend that a good hermeneutics of desire is essential to liberate freedom from a pure ‘negative’ conception (freedom from constraints, etc.) and to cultivate a ‘positive’ understanding of freedom: one that unfolds in dialogue with inescapable horizons of meaning and is crucial for the pursuit of fullness and human flourishing.

While it is commonly believed that satisfying one’s desires leads to the achievement of well-being, we will argue that well-being can truly be the counterpart of human flourishing

only if it involves an inescapable engagement with the fundamental questions about the good life. The very possibility of questioning meaningfulness reveals the presence of a subject who is the locus of desires, intentionality, and self-consciousness. The aim of a hermeneutics of desire is not to determine a priori which desires are good or bad, but rather to uncover the nature of the desiring subject so that his/her freedom may be oriented – through the cultivation of virtues and practical reasoning – toward goods that can genuinely satisfy his/her desires.

Finally, I will argue that norms are not sufficient, and that nomolatriy – the excessive veneration of rules – can blind us to those goods that are essential not only to our well-being but also for our human flourishing.

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Aristotle on the Unity of Individual and Collective Flourishing

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This paper explores Aristotle's conception of human flourishing (eudaimonia) as an essentially communal practice. I argue that Aristotle's understanding of flourishing stands in sharp contrast to modern ideological and educational approaches grounded in neoliberal individualism. At the heart of Aristotle's ethics lies the conviction that we achieve human flourishing through shared life within the polis. Crucially, virtues such as justice, generosity, and courage are essentially relational: they are cultivated and "activated" only through engagement with others. Human flourishing, therefore, is not an individual and solitary accomplishment but a shared achievement rooted in civic friendship and participation in collective life.

The discussion unfolds in three parts. It begins by revisiting Aristotle's teleological framework, which situates economic, educational, and political activity within the wider pursuit of the good life. Whereas household management and market exchange serve primarily instrumental ends, the polis exists "for the sake of living well," embodying the common good as an end in itself. Building on this foundation, the paper argues that neoliberal individualism wrongly collapses the notion of the common good into private gain, mistaking material suc-

cess for genuine fulfillment. For Aristotle, however, wealth and market relations are merely tools; when treated as ultimate goals, they distort the very purpose of human life. This critique has important implications for education: rather than producing competitive market actors or “human capital,” education should cultivate moral character, civic virtue, and the habits that sustain a just and cooperative community.

The final section turns to the relevance of Aristotle’s framework today. If flourishing depends on a just political community, who belongs within that circle of concern. Is it only citizens, or also migrants, future generations, and even non-human beings? Moreover, in an era of globalization and ecological crisis, where should we locate the polis? Should it reside within the nation-state, regional unions like the European Union, or the human community as a whole?

These questions reveal both the challenges and the applicability of Aristotelian ideas today. They invite us to rethink education and civic life in light of contemporary concerns such as intergenerational justice, environmental responsibility, and the extent of compassion and solidarity. Ultimately, the paper reaffirms Aristotle’s insight that individual and collective flourishing are inseparable. To treat human flourishing as a purely private or economic matter is to undermine the very conditions of the good life. Reimagining education and redesigning curricula around the cultivation of a virtuous character and the common good, I suggest, is essential for addressing the moral and civic challenges of our time and for realizing human flourishing in its fullest sense.

*Alleviating Developmental Moral Unluck:
A Normative Case for Phronimoi
Teacher Role Models*

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Exposure to moral role models is, but ought not be, a matter of moral luck. Moral luck, in neo-Aristotelian terms, can be conceptualised partly as developmental luck, whereby the quality and availability of characterological influences – such as the presence of moral role models or character friendships between peers – affect an agent’s moral development. Since virtuous character development is contingent upon and vulnerable to such influences, one may construe any lack of these emulative figures in the lives of children as a case of developmental moral unluck. This is because, if we understand the presence of role models to give learners a moral developmental advantage, their absence equates to a moral developmental disadvantage.

Going further, if we understand the cultivation of virtuous character to be conducive to and partly constitutive of eudaimonia, i.e., flourishing or objective well-being, and the emulation of role models to be at least necessary for virtuous character development, then a lack of moral role models will also adversely affect one’s ability to flourish. Therefore, the moral disadvantage, as described, leads to a flourishing disadvantage. Assuming the link between developmental moral

luck, emulation qua role modelling and flourishing holds, it should be clear that providing children with the capabilities – in the form of a more opportune upbringing – necessary for proper moral functioning in later life is of primary moral educational concern.

Appealing to a previous theory of emulation qua role modelling as a theoretical springboard, in this paper, I argue that teachers have a normative obligation to serve as moral role models to pupils, to alleviate the developmental moral unluck caused by a lack of such influences elsewhere. Yet this important stipulation runs into a potentially substantial ‘threshold’ problem to which this paper is largely dedicated to overcoming. Indeed, since emulation stimulates the development of moral virtue and phronesis in learners, and is driven by the psycho-moral mechanism of entangled phronesis, in order to be the subject of emulation, role models are required to be sufficiently phronetic. Yet many teachers are insufficiently phronetic and thus inadequate role models. This results in a threshold problem which I formulate in two ways:

Strong threshold problem: the vast majority of teachers enter the profession lacking the correct motivational structures produced by habituated virtue which makes the cultivation of phronesis an impossibility.

Weak threshold problem: many teachers enter the profession with at least a grounding in habituated virtue, and whilst not yet phronimoi themselves, can hope to become one in part by emulating an experienced teacher who is.

Arguing against the strong and in favour of the weak threshold problem, I then further my thesis by proposing that elevating teachers from habituated ‘virtue’ to phronetically-informed virtue requires that they too have experienced phronimoi within the teaching profession to emulate. In doing so, I also address existing methods of virtue development in adults, yet

finding that each to an extent relies on guidance from phronimoi role models, propose emulation itself as a more direct and parsimonious solution. Ultimately, then, as teacher phronimoi are not only paragons of good character in general but also role models in the sense that they embody virtues specifically related to the day-to-day practice of teaching, they are especially salient for enabling all teachers to eventually reach the phronetic threshold required to be role models to pupils.

*Cultivating Desires Through Practical Wisdom:
Some Strategies from the Psychological
Research on Trait Self-Control*

Sverre Granmo Hertzberg

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Aristotle famously argues that the virtues of character are unified through phronesis – if a person possesses practical wisdom in the complete sense, they also possess the excellent character traits of temperance, courage and friendliness (EN, Book XI). This means that there is an intimate link between a virtuous person's capacities for reasoning and deliberation and their appetitive and emotional inclinations. Developing practical wisdom is dependent on cultivating your desires and vice versa. But how this process is conceived of is subject to much dispute.

In this paper, I review some recent psychological literature on self-control in order to sketch out a picture of the process of habituation that can tell us how employing practical wisdom can cultivate emotional and appetitive development.

Recent studies have shown that people with high trait self-control rarely have to exercise state self-control, understood as momentary effortful inhibition of impulses (Hofman et al, 2012). Instead, they have cultivated beneficial habits that automatize the behavior they desire (De Ridder et. al., 2012).

I argue that the automatization of beneficial behavior through cultivating habits is the essence of acquiring virtue and con-

sider some of the best strategies for this process found in the psychological literature. Duckworth et al. (2015) have mapped out a taxonomy of the various strategies that can be used to successfully pursue higher valued goals that go beyond moment-to-moment impulse suppression, leading them to posit five ‘families’ divided into two groups – three intrapsychic strategies and two situational strategies.

I go through these strategies and argue that employing them should be considered a key component of using practical wisdom to cultivate desires, as the research shows that once a habit is formed, your desires start aligning with your rational judgments (Milyavskaya and Inzlicht, 2015; Gillebaart, Denise & de Ridder, 2015; Stojanovic & Wood, 2025).

*First Aid, Fish Schools, and Flourishing:
Exploring Aristotle's Phronesis in Relation
to Eudaimonia Among UK Doctors*

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Kemmis (2010) suggests that education is fundamentally about learning to live well and contributing to the creation of a world worth living in. In parallel, Schei, Fuks, and Boudreau (2019) argue that the purpose of medical education is to help learners become capable professionals – not only by acquiring knowledge and technical skills but also by developing the moral dispositions, attitudes, and habits of thought and behaviour essential to the healing professions. Philosophy, as the love of wisdom, is similarly concerned with contemplating how to live well. These expansive definitions challenge the traditionally positivist and reductionist paradigms that dominate medical education.

By synthesising these perspectives, this research informed presentation proposes that engaging with educational philosophy – particularly Aristotelian ethics – can offer deeper insights into how we educate clinicians, with the ultimate aim of promoting flourishing (eudaimonia) for both practitioners and patients. This also invites a re-examination of the ethical foundations of medicine and the meaning of the goals of medicine and health itself – questions that are increasingly urgent

in the context of systemic pressures within healthcare, burn-out and moral injury.

This talk will outline empirical doctoral research that sought to identify and understand the attributes of *phronemoi* doctors – those who embody *phronesis*, or practical wisdom. Using a heuristic grounded in Aristotelian Virtue Ethics (as a student of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, Birmingham), the study explored how such wisdom manifests in family medicine practitioners (Jameel, 2021). Interestingly, the analysis revealed that many of the identified attributes were psychological in nature – such as openness, optimism and a strong sense of agency – raising the question of how these might be cultivated within medical education.

The presentation introduces an innovative conceptual framework for understanding flourishing, using the metaphor of a fish school. This analogy captures the dynamic interplay of emergence towards a *telos* (purpose). The findings unravel socio-cultural narratives through which to view professional development and well-being. It also highlights the limitations of individualistic notions of *phronesis* and the challenges of scalability in large institutional settings.

Finally, the presentation reflects on the practical implications of educating for *phronesis*, within a professionalism curriculum, in a large UK medical school, five years after the completion of the original doctoral research. It considers the tensions between curriculum design, assessment, institutional culture, and the lived experiences of students and educators. The discussion will explore how philosophical inquiry, empirical research, and pedagogical innovation can converge to reimagine medical education – not merely as a technical training ground, but as a moral and humanistic endeavour aimed at cultivating wise, compassionate, and flourishing practitioners.

*Everyday Virtues:
Towards an Aesthetics of Happiness*

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Everyday Aesthetics, a relatively new subfield in contemporary aesthetics, focuses on the aesthetic: experiences and values, associated with everyday life (Saitō 2007; 2017; Light 2005). From the outset, it has recognized the profound influence of aesthetics on shaping our identity and moral choices. Consequently, it has explored how reshaping our aesthetic sensibilities can impact our behavior, possibly promoting positive outcomes such as pro-environmental attitudes.

Recently, Saitō (2022) proposed further investigating the interconnectedness between ethics and aesthetics, leading to the development of aesthetics of care. Inspired by the success of Saitō's project and the long-standing relationship between ethics and aesthetics, this paper aims to take a complementary approach. It proposes applying the Everyday Aesthetics to virtue ethics, particularly to the question of happiness. In fact, virtue ethics has to confront the apparent tension between the goal of human well-being representing some sort of egocentrism and the moral ideal of a virtuous person (Russell 2012). In turn, the characteristic feature of Everyday Aesthetics is its departure from the classical Western evaluation of aesthetic goods. Instead, it incorporates a broader, Japanese and

Confucian-inspired perspective, embracing rejected aesthetic qualities associated with transience, deterioration, and aging (Cheyne 2023). I claim that a similar step can be taken for various aspects of life which seemingly oppose to well-being.

Following the recent literature on coping with suffering, I propose an aesthetic model of happiness not despite, but including rejected aspects of life (Nussbaum and Levmore 2017; Brady 2018; Bain, Brady, and Corns 2020). While Saitō may not explicitly use the framework of virtue theory, one can suggest that what would be an aesthetic virtue in her theory involves the harmonious integration of the diverse classical and rejected aesthetic values. In my paper, I generalize this approach and propose the virtue of integrating both the positive and negative aspects of life. Happiness, in this framework, would be defined as a virtuous life where the individual, through the cultivation of the virtue of integration, achieves a state of personal equilibrium in their experiences. In the final part, I explore the potential implications of this model re-uniting ethics and aesthetics.

Social Comparison a Threat to Well-Being?

Wojciech Kaftanski

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Everywhere we turn, comparison is ubiquitous. We compare things and find them more or less comparable. Human propensity to compare with other people, termed Social Comparison Theory, has been studied extensively in the fields of sociology and psychology, and but also in sport, management, and economics. Only recently there has been some interest in providing a philosophical and moral psychological perspective on social comparison with a view of whether social comparison behaviors and dispositions are good or bad for us.¹ In this presentation I offer an analysis of social comparison in relation to the theory of virtues with a view of determining whether and under what conditions it can be deemed beneficial, harmful or neutral to human well-being.

Firstly, I will delineate the dynamics of social comparison by outlining the three comparative directions that it entails: vertical upward, vertical downward, and horizontal. Secondly, I will present the epistemological moral, and social role of social comparison in David Hume, Adam Smith, and Søren Kierkegaard considering especially the types of moral emotions, attitudes and behaviors that triggered, produced, or augmented by social comparison can be deemed vicious. Of special

interest here are the emotions of envy and admiration, compassion and scorn, and the dispositional and episodic nature of social comparison behaviors. Thirdly, I will consider the role of social comparison in formation of virtuous relationships such as friendship and exemplarity asking about the conditions under which social comparison facilitates or threatens friendship and exemplarity.

Lastly, I will engage empirical research on the influence of social comparison various aspects of human optimal functioning, such as mental health, work efficiency, motivation. I will focus especially on recent research that indicates the prominence of habitual and dispositional comparison in young adults, but also the continuously growing frequency of reported social comparison acts in young adults on social media platforms associated with an increase in mental health diagnoses in young adults.

*Some Comments on Julia Annas’ ‘Virtue and Flourishing’**

Kristján Kristjánsson

University of Birmingham, UK

This paper is an invited commentary on Julia Annas’ keynote, ‘Virtue and Flourishing’. A distinction is often made between Aristotelian interpreters and applicators, where the former are not concerned with the current feasibility of Aristotle’s moral, political, or educational theorising, whereas the applicators are. But Julia straddles this distinction and makes it irrelevant. As can be seen from her (2011) book, *Intelligent Virtue*, she often draws on social scientific – especially psychological – sources to strengthen her Aristotelian argument, as Aristotle himself would no doubt have done himself today. But apart from this cross-disciplinary orientation, Julia has something that most of her colleagues lack: the gift of the gab in making her arguments accessible to a general audience. This gift is much in evidence in her present keynote.

As it is difficult for me to offer constructive, let alone critical, comments in about 1000 words on a keynote that I happen to agree with 99%, what I do is simply to add a new empirical embellishment to her main thesis about the relationship between virtue and flourishing and then offer two minor misgivings.

* These comments refer to Julia Annas’ paper (abstract in this book).

The first misgiving concerns her strong belief that the virtues form a package deal: 'It's revealingly difficult to think of somebody who develops a virtue such as compassion on its own, with no thoughts at all about her life as a whole' (p. 10), she says, for example. I do think that the virtues are in fact, in the lives of most people, less integrated than Julia suggests. I have known people who are extremely compassionate and caring but who sometimes lack the courage and confidence to put these virtues into action when it matters most in taxing situations. But Julia also says (p. 14): 'Virtue requires the practical intelligence which unifies virtue, and which thus actively directs your life, and gives everything its place and role in your life.' So perhaps there is no difference between me and her in our view of what the ideally integrated life, overseen by *phronesis*, looks like.

The second misgiving concerns Julia's skill analogy. I do agree with her that the structure of learning a skill is more or less the same as that of learning a virtue. But I hesitate to draw the conclusion that virtue is 'just like a practical skill' (p. 7). I am saying this because I think that no skill – at least on a standard understanding – comes anywhere close to a standard moral virtue in terms of the existential crisis and existential angst that can accompany their non-execution. If virtue is to be specified as a skill, then that specification would widen the definition of a skill, away from ordinary language, in a way that I doubt is very helpful.

These two small differences between me and Julia Annas do not challenge in any way the main thrust of her argument in this persuasively argued and well-turned keynote.

Compassion out of Flourishing: Nietzsche's Gift-Giving Virtue

Laura Langone

Klassik Stiftung Weimar, Germany

In this paper, I will show how Nietzsche's concept of the gift-giving virtue provides an account of flourishing which, while aiming at individual wellbeing, also opens up to the encounter with the other, ultimately making compassion possible. Although Nietzsche is well known for his fierce critique of compassion, especially aimed at Christianity, I will illustrate that this critique applies only from the point of view of weakness, and not of flourishing. Nietzsche criticises compassion mostly because, in his eyes, by taking upon us the suffering of others, we ourselves end up suffering, which essentially prevents us from focusing on our own flourishing. Whereas for what he calls 'the sick type', compassion is dangerous as it makes them sicker, instead, for the flourishing or 'strong type' compassion appears to be inevitable, as an outgrowth of their fullness. Nietzsche's critique of compassion turns out to be a critique of weakness, not of compassion per se, which seems to be the ultimate outcome of flourishing instead.

Flourishing turns out to be living according to the essence of life: will to power. Nietzsche defines good that which increases the feeling of power and bad that which does not. Although 'power' has been interpreted in many ways in the Nietzsche

scholarship, not least in the political sense, I will show how it essentially means the power of appropriation of the world through the creation of meanings, values, perspectives. The more we give meanings to things, the more we come to appropriate the world, to exert 'power' on it. By giving meanings to things, they can thus become the 'companions' of our flourishing. Giving meanings to things is an endless process. We should constantly create meanings, give up them and then create new ones. This continuous creation and destruction of values is the gift-giving virtue.

By cultivating this virtue, we live according to the essence of life as will to power, thereby increasing our feeling of power, fullness and partially achieving flourishing in a process that has no end. In embodying the essence of life, we momentarily come to experience such a fullness that we cannot do without giving, like a 'bee that has gathered too much honey'. We simply need to give, as we are too full. It is from this point of view that compassion, as the absolute form of giving, is not only permitted, but even encouraged. If giving is essential to flourishing, then giving fully in the form of compassion enables the fullest expression of flourishing. From the perspective of flourishing, compassion, giving ourselves to the other, far from making us weaker, emerges as the ultimate expression of strength and vitality.

Well-Being, Degrees of Realism, and Virtue

Andrea Lavazza

Pegaso University, Italy

Recent philosophical discussions on realism, particularly the emphasis on a realist ontology that is not reducible to subjectivist or relativist perspectives, have significant implications for psychology. “New realism” asserts the primacy of ontology over epistemology – what exists is independent of our conceptual schemes or linguistic practices and remains “unamendable” (Ferraris, 2014). This stands in contrast to postmodern conceptions that regard reality as socially constructed and infinitely malleable.

This paper explores the implications of realism for empirical psychology and practical ethics, specifically in relation to happiness and well-being (Heybron, 2008). I analyze the relationship between subjective well-being, external world states, and neural events associated with (or potentially causally responsible for) happiness. By outlining different degrees of realism applied to conceptions of well-being, I aim to provide a theoretical and practical framework to assess their coherence and their ability to offer reliable guidance in engaging with the world as it is.

I propose three forms of realism concerning happiness.

1. *Internal realism*, which is naturalistic, fully objective, and mind-independent, closely tied to brain function and thus largely autonomous from external world states (Berridge and Kringelbach, 2011).
2. *External realism*, which posits that happiness is contingent on objective states of the world, where external conditions are primary determinants of well-being.
3. *Metaphysical realism*, which envisions happiness as rooted in an objective, natural order that is mind independent yet accessible through non-naturalistic faculties, often associated with rationalist traditions.

In contrast, I also discuss irrealist conceptions of happiness, which have deep historical roots. These include eudaimonic traditions that prioritize detachment from the external world and an inward focus, as well as more extreme prescriptive theories that advocate reinterpreting reality to sustain subjective well-being, irrespective of actual external conditions. Furthermore, irrealism is evident in the use of psychoactive substances to modify perception and uncover supposed “true” selves.

Finally, I examine the role of virtues in promoting well-being, arguing that virtue-based approaches may offer a more realistic foundation for understanding and achieving happiness. By mapping these different perspectives onto current psychological and ethical debates, this paper seeks to clarify the ways in which realism can contribute to a more robust and empirically grounded theory of well-being.

Ethics of Belief, Doxastic Duties and Well-Being

Marialucrezia Leone

Pegaso University, Italy

The expression ‘Ethics of Belief’ takes its origin from the title of a lecture by the British mathematician William Kingdon Clifford (1845-1879), published in the *Contemporary Review* in January 1877: *The Ethics of Belief*¹. In this text, Clifford asserts the duty to always validate every belief through the scrutiny of doubt and logical-rational control (i.e., the adoption of epistemic doxastic rules). The rather singular aspect of his doctrine is that the ‘duty to investigate Beliefs’ also represents a moral duty; in other words, only belief authenticated with epistemically valid proofs gains ethical value.

The theoretical counterpart of Clifford’s position is usually found in the lecture by the American philosopher William James (1842-1910), *The Will to Believe*². In this essay, James, unlike Clifford, defends the right to believe what one wants to believe, even independent of a verification produced by epistemic evidence. This is why he promotes what has been called ‘prudential doxastic rules’³. According to such rules, when the agent finds himself in the condition of having to choose – without being able to appeal to epistemic paradigms –, he is expected to prefer ‘the reasons of the heart’. Against Clifford, for James morally valid is thus not necessarily believing in some-

thing justified (and thus not believing in what is false), but rather believing in what brings pleasure and practical benefits to the believer. Put another way, to the epistemic and evidentialist reasoning promoted by Clifford, aimed at the conquest of 'Real Knowledge', James opposes a so-called 'pragmatic' option, aimed at achieving, through belief, personal and emotional benefits related to the well-being of the believer. However, is a belief, solely accepted or rejected in virtue of the personal pleasure or profit of the believer and beyond an epistemic foundation and lacking evidence, condemnable from an ethical point of view?

The contribution intends to consider some examples of authors who, in the history of philosophy, have proposed the adoption of doxastic rules aimed primarily at achieving the believer's well-being, by reconstructing their doctrinal and moral debates.

*Flourished Well-Being:
Metaphysics of Anthropological Differences
Across Philosophy and Psychology*

Antonio Lizzadri

Catholic University of Milan, Italy

In this presentation I aim to explore the relationship between human flourishing and well-being from a theoretical perspective, by reflecting on the epistemic status of philosophical and psychological knowledge. I maintain that the opposition between the idea of human flourishing as realization of a universal and objective ideal of the human nature (Finnis 1979; Nussbaum 2000) and the idea of well-being as a positive psychological individual state resulting from the satisfaction of subjective needs (Feldman 2004; Crisp 2006) depends on a theoretical dichotomy between the third-person eidetic or metaphysical viewpoint of philosophical knowledge and the first-person empirical viewpoint of psychological knowledge.

I argue that by rejecting this dichotomy it does not mean to deny the trivial fact that human beings empirically manifest different and even divergent subjective preferences hardly traceable back to a single universal ideal of human nature, but to affirm – both from a conceptual and experiential level – that, on the one hand, the subjective well-being cannot be achieved without referring to an ideal dimension – whatever it may be – since by creating what we want to be we create at the same time an image of the human being (Sartre 1946)

and that, on the other hand, the ideal cannot be a true ideal if it cannot grasp the concrete experience by shedding light and making the particular existential condition understandable without ideological censure.

Therefore, I maintain that the separation of human flourishing and well-being is aporetic and that it would rather be necessary to think of a “flourished well-being” – that is, an integration between the metaphysical ideal of human flourishing and the subjective psychological well-being – by renewing our conception of the philosophical/metaphysical as well as psychological knowledge, while opening Psychology to an ideal anthropological dimension and Metaphysics to the lived life emotional dimension.

In this regard, I will especially discuss Gustavo Bontadini’s conception of Metaphysics as philosophy of the “anthropological differences” (Bontadini 1958), that by assuming the very lack of a unique ideal of human nature as a transcendental characteristic of humanity it allows for the elaboration of a properly philosophical discourse just on the subjective psychological differences. More precisely, it will finally stand out how this philosophical discourse on anthropological differences coincides with the experience of the human dialogue about the meaning of temporality.

*Shame and Virtue:
Some Reflections on Contemporary Societies*

Roberto Luppi

University of Palermo, Italy

The relationship between shame and virtue has often been overlooked in philosophical discourse on virtue, despite numerous thinkers – from Aristotle to John Rawls (particularly in the third section of *A Theory of Justice*) – highlighting their close connection and identifying shame as one of the primary emotions driving virtuous action in individuals under certain circumstances.

Building on Aristotelian writings and drawing from reflections by scholars such as Martha Nussbaum – especially her work *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law* (Italian edition: *Nascondere l'umanità. Il disgusto, la vergogna, la legge*, Rome, Carocci, 2005) – this contribution seeks to explore the interplay between shame and virtue.

This focus offers an interesting and innovative lens for decoding (and critiquing) certain mechanisms of contemporary neoliberal societies.

Particularly in relation to certain “categories” of individuals, such as precarious workers and the poor, dominant rhetoric often emphasizes character flaws (e.g., laziness) and/or behavioral shortcomings (e.g., accusations of social parasitism or

free riding). This rhetoric frequently communicates – either explicitly or implicitly – that these groups lack fundamental virtues, those virtues at the core of neoliberalism: autonomy, independence, flexibility, self-entrepreneurship, and so on. By invoking these virtues, for instance, precarious workers are simultaneously encouraged to overcome their precarious conditions (or capitalize on them) and made to feel shame for their perceived lack of such virtues in their daily actions.

A critical analysis of this mechanism – (1) absence of certain virtues, (2) shame, (3) acquisition of these virtues, (4) action – can help the afore-mentioned groups to decode the deeper mechanisms of the societies in which they live and to direct their (virtuous) action more consciously. This “awareness” may lead, in some cases, to the contestation of dominant virtues, which are often the source of the hardships experienced by these groups.

Human Flourishing and Life-Goals: A Proposal for Integrating Ethics and Psychology

Armando Manchisi

University of Turin, Italy

In ethics, the concept of “human flourishing” refers to the development of the fundamental capacities of human beings. This approach, commonly called perfectionism, has the advantage of providing an objectivist foundation for the theory of well-being, since it holds that what is valuable in life is grounded in human nature, rather than individual choice. However, this perspective often overlooks the importance of subjective dispositions and preferences in determining what is good or fulfilling for a person.

In my talk, I propose a strategy to bridge this gap by incorporating insights from the psychology of goals. Specifically, I argue that human flourishing depends not only on the exercise of special capacities but also on the achievement of freely chosen life-goals. In this way, I would like to sketch an account of well-being that combines the objectivist foundation of perfectionist ethics with the subject-sensitivity of the psychology of goals.

1. In the first part, I outline the central tenets of perfectionist ethics, focusing on Richard Kraut’s view. According to Kraut

(2007: 137), «a flourishing human being is one who possesses, develops, and enjoys the exercise of cognitive, affective, sensory, and social powers (no less than physical powers)». In this framework, well-being thus consists in the optimal realization of the capacities that characterize the human life-form as such. Perfectionism thereby manages to distinguish between what is objectively good for someone and what they subjectively believe to be good (but may not be).

2. In the second part, I introduce key concepts from the psychology of goals (Moskowitz & Grant 2009). The central insight here is that human behavior is inherently goal-directed and regulated by feedback control processes. As a consequence, success in achieving one's goals crucially influences subjective fulfillment. In particular, what we may call life-goals play a key role, i.e., those persistent ends that rank very high in the hierarchy of a person's preferences, and thus organize and unify their decisions and actions.

3. In the final part, I sketch an account of well-being that integrates these two perspectives (Tiberius 2018; DeYoung & Tiberius 2023). On this account, fundamental human capacities should be employed in the pursuit of freely chosen life-goals. But, at the same time, these capacities should act as a "guiding framework" to select as truly valuable and worthy of pursuit only those goals that express the characteristic powers of human nature. This account thus combines objectivism and subjectivism, by explaining human flourishing as a person's commitment to autonomously shaping her life.

Groups' Virtues and Well-Being

Manuel Marsico

University of Genoa, Italy

It is common to ascribe virtues (or vices) to groups, and it seems possible to identify situations where a group is virtuous, even if its individual members are not. Consequently, in the debate surrounding collective, plural, or shared virtues, anti-summativists contend that being a group involves more than the mere aggregation of individual properties (Anderson, 2012; Byrley, 2016; Fricker, 2010; Lahroodi, 2007; Sandin, 2007).

In contrast, summativists argue that a group is virtuous as long as the individuals comprising it are virtuous (Cordell, 2017; Weber, 2007; Ziv, 2012). I argue that a hybrid perspective is possible. If we consider that a virtuous agent must be capable of perceiving, deliberating, regulating emotions, and being motivated in the right way (De Caro et al., 2024), then, on the one hand, virtue remains a personal trait; on the other hand, some traits can be activated only in a group-dependent context.

Thus, while a group's virtue may reflect the synchronic sum of individual traits, the role of the plural subject should still be preserved. Importantly, the group itself should be taken seriously, though understood as merely a joint commitment

among individuals (Gilbert, 1990). If this holds true, wellbeing – intended as flourishing – must align not only with the individual development of virtues but also with certain standards of correctness for being a group. Therefore, I propose a normative account in which plural subjects must respect their constitutive elements to promote virtuous individual traits. These include the principles of publicity and the acceptance of reasonable internal conflicts.

Following this approach, the concept of plural virtues, conceived as a dynamic aggregation of synchronically activated individual traits, serves to describe, explain, and provide normative insights into the nature of collective flourishing.

Challenges in Character Education: The Role of Context, Policy, and Individual Responsibility

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Since ancient Greece, character education has held a central place in educational philosophy. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle identifies two forms of virtue: ethical and dianoetic. The former refer to reason in the strict sense, while the latter pertain to the practical uses of reason. Ethical virtues are defined as excellences of character, whose task is to guide human reason to recognize what is good and to act accordingly on the basis of sound reasoning (and not merely according to emotions or inclinations). This ultimately translates into living well, that is, the realization of *Eudaimonia* (flourishing). Crucially, Aristotle situates character education within a political framework, linking individual moral development with the broader aim of cultivating virtuous citizens for the common good of the polis, particularly during times of sociopolitical instability (de la Fuente, 2023).

In the present day, global conditions demand a renewed examination of character education. According to Global Peace Index report (2023), 59 conflicts are ongoing worldwide. These conflicts significantly impact education, which is now facing severe crisis: none of the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goals for education have been fully achieved,

and many key indicators have shown signs of regression (World Bank, 2025). These realities prompt an urgent question: what is the purpose of character education today, and under what conditions can it succeed?

The effectiveness of modern frameworks, such as that of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues (JCCV), depends on several ideal conditions: a safe and inclusive school environment, well-trained educators, and engaged families (Arthur & Kristjánsson, 2022). These requirements are not universally available – particularly in conflict-affected or economically disadvantaged regions – thus making the implementation of such models aspirational rather than practical in many parts of the world (Arbués & Servin, 2019; Jhon, 2021). Additionally, the current character education discourse remains largely rooted in Western contexts, raising concerns about its global adaptability and inclusiveness (Brooks & Villacís, 2023; Ofsted, 2019).

Given the scale of human suffering in conflict zones, where over 2 billion people currently live, traditional notions of character education focused on flourishing may seem disconnected from the lived realities of many. In such contexts, it may be more appropriate to shift the focus toward “virtues for survival” (Calhoun, 2008; Tessman, 2005), aligning character education with “minima ethics,” or ethics of basic needs. This reorientation foregrounds human vulnerability and prioritizes moral responses to conditions of deprivation and insecurity.

In conclusion, character education must be responsive to contextual realities and grounded in effective, localized policy-making. Character education must remain attentive to human vulnerability, to inequality, and to the very different conditions under which lives unfold.

Is Right Reason Against Well-Being?

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A critical issue in the relationship between moral philosophy and psychology is the role of well-being as a component of happiness. Various branches of experimental and clinical psychology are increasingly intersecting with the philosophical dimension of the phenomena they study. Among these, the concept of meaning and purpose in life holds a central role as a guiding force for human action. The significance of activities extends beyond their functional aspects, such as efficiency or even the satisfaction derived from setting and achieving goals. Aristotle argued that the activity of a virtuous person generates a certain degree of satisfaction in the individual.

In doing so, he emphasised the close interconnection between emotional, cognitive, and volitional aspects, alongside the intrinsic enjoyment of goods. In the life of a truly virtuous person, the defining feature is a harmonious integration of joy in the pursuit of the good. A clear illustration of this ideal is the contrast between a genuinely temperate person and one who is merely moderate. Their internal experience differs: the former acts with genuine satisfaction, whereas the latter performs the action with a sense of resignation and inner conflict.

Aristotle and Aquinas maintain that this emotional experience is contingent on the continuous exercise of right reason. This suggests that, through experience, human beings develop an understanding of their own inclinations, the goods towards which these inclinations are directed, and the most appropriate way to integrate them into their lives virtuously. Giuseppe Abbà provides a nuanced analysis of the hierarchy of human goods, drawing on Aristotelian and Thomistic thought. His framework serves as a reference point for conceptualising well-being in relation to other fundamental goods.

*Patient-Centred Medical Practice between
External Regulations and Internalized
Virtues – Is the Tension Real?*

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In its many versions, patient-centred medicine (PCM) has been putting an accent on the direct and human-oriented approach that should be nurtured between a doctor and a patient. While this view would assume some specific outlooks, we will name only a few relevant for the current context. We are starting from a broad view that both doctors and patients should knowledgeably contribute on the span of anamnestic-treatment process, albeit that knowledge differs in the two. At a minimum theoretically defending and presupposing the idea and possibility of such a phenomenon to thrive, we additionally postulate not only specific input one in illness can provide, but also two more points: a) Sets of “soft skills” in form of rational and affective capacities for subtleties needed for different knowledge transfers, and that b) the primary drive for personalised health restoration should be based on virtuous character-building. While each of these has its own how to, here our primary goal is to ask if practicing a personalised and virtuous comportment in doctor-patient relationship is in a necessary tension with not only current healthcare systems, but also (healthcare) systems and policies as such, them being external regulators of medical practice.

To start with, we hold that moral character is more important than obligations and right actions, but that the two shouldn't be mutually exclusive (Pellegrino & Thomasma, 1993). In that framework, we plan to tackle the question of tension from two angles.

Firstly, going back to Aristotle, and his premise that medical art is not the cause of health being good, but only a cause of health being produced (EE, I 8), as well as that the value of health spans as much as it contributes to the overall welfare (eudaimonia). Since both medicine and politics should align with the maximal good, therefore subordinating to the prudent behaviour (NE II; Pol. II, 1252a, etc.), the tension between societal and political structures, and a practice of virtues should be almost non-existent. However, although a doctor as an expert would be competent to determine what is best for reaching health in individuals, both for their own and collective reach of welfare, a politician can bend this and the overall pursuit of welfare, succumbing to secondary gains (Pol. III).

Secondly, we plan to approach this question from the perspective of social ontology (Konzelmann Ziv & Bernahard Schmid, 2013), showing that relationships pertaining to classes or groups, whether put in a legal framework or just layers of societal norms, are and should to an extent be incommensurable with individuals involved.

This does not mean virtues in public health have not been recognised as a valuable asset for policy-enhancement (Nihlén Fahlquist, 2019; MacKay, 2021), but that a nature of an immediate and actual, personal relationship between a certain doctor and a certain patient is a direct ground for a full display of character, and character-building qualities such as virtues.

We conclude that the external regulations, even if particularly enriched by reliance and inspiration of virtue ethics, represent a tension that a group setting would expectedly impose

on a personal one, but also that support of PCM and a dedicated personalised practice of virtue-shaped behaviour in doctor-patient encounters can and should represent an individual-to-collective point of pressure on the healthcare systems and policies. This two-way tension can either be for better or worse, which remains to be discussed in more details in the paper.

*Meaning Beyond Happiness?
A Pluralist Account of Eudaimonia
and Moral Value in Vulnerability*

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The tension between the pursuit of happiness and the quest for meaning as central elements of human experience has been widely questioned in psychology and philosophy. Inspired to various degrees by Victor Frankl's logotherapy and its critique of Freudian and Adlerian understandings of desire and self-realization, some accounts have emphasized the difference between happiness and meaningfulness (Leontiev 2005; Baumeister et al. 2012; Costello 2016;).

Others have instead sought an integrative avenue, locating the search for meaning within a broad understanding of Eudaimonic well-being that includes, but is not limited to, hedonic elements (Ryff 2014; Danvers et al. 2016). Finally, a recent line of inquiry has postulated that the concept of psychological richness should be added to happiness and meaning as a third, irreducible dimension of human flourishing (Shigehiro et al. 2020; Oishi et al. 2022).

I suggest that happiness, meaningfulness and richness are interrelated, but also that we should resist the tendency to conflate them into a single understanding of well-being. Both pursuit of happiness and quest for meaning can fall within the semantic area of eudaimonia, but they do not overlap, and they

rather signal a pluralist nature of the concept that can be already acknowledged within the classical discourse on virtues. The Socratic *eudaimonia* highlights the importance of individual and collective inquiry towards a meaningful life worth living, whereas the Aristotelian picture focuses on an organic understanding of human flourishing, and the Cynic tradition anticipates elements now reflected in the psychological richness hypothesis, such as the openness to a variety of individual experiences.

I argue that a pluralist understanding of the human telos, which emphasizes the search for meaning and its irreducibility to notions of happiness and richness, has significant implications for moral theory in at least two areas:

(i) It is helpful to interpret some relevant aspects of moral experience that do not fit easily into the semantic realm of well-being and self-realization, such as suffering, effort, self-sacrifice and mortality. A vast literature, from Frankl's autobiographical account of life in concentration camps (Frankl 1985) to contemporary advancements in the medical humanities and the ethics of care (Kim 2020), supports the view that in profound experiences of embodied vulnerability the moral value of choices and actions is accurately appreciated in terms of individual and collective meaningfulness rather than happiness, success or achievement.

(ii) It contributes to the conceptual articulation of the integrative function of *phronesis*, by reconsidering some of its most recent characterizations (Kristjánsson et al. 2021; De Caro, Marraffa, Vaccarezza 2021) with an awareness of the moral significance of meaning in vulnerability. In particular, I suggest that our ability to formulate appropriate moral judgments in conditions of adversity mainly revolves around our capacity as agents – and patients – to reflectively embody in

our agency a quest for meaning situated within a moral community of exemplars.

A pluralist account of eudaimonia thus expands our understanding of moral value and judgment in the light of our experience of vulnerability without directly setting it at odds with notions of flourishing and well-being.

Beyond Knowledge: The Ethical Power of Curiosity, Humility and Creativity

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This paper explores the interconnectedness of the virtues of curiosity and humility and how both serve a critical function in the development of creativity – not only to open spaces for creative “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) or to foster a character of exemplary genius such as that found in Leonardo Da Vinci (Gelb, 1998), but to ensure its mature moral development. Creativity is arguably essential in the development of phronesis. Robert Sternberg (2014) argues that it is difficult to be ethical without being creative (while the reverse is possible), as ethical dilemmas often require innovative solutions that cannot be reached without creativity. He further emphasizes that creativity is not merely an artistic or aesthetic pursuit but an essential part of each individual’s reflective moral decision-making process. A creative approach to ethics enables individuals to break free from conventions, think critically, and devise solutions that are both novel and morally sound.

This project attempts to make explicit how creative flourishing depends upon an extensive development and exercise of both curiosity and humility. Psychology research has shown that individuals who exhibit high levels of both tend to be more open to new experiences and to have higher tolerance for ambiguity.

Regarding curiosity, this project draws from the Nietzschean call for “perspectivism” (Alfano, 2019) as a phronetic dynamic that is critical for the creative enterprise. Without curiosity, there is little impetus to develop the insights necessary for ethical deliberation, as it is the pursuit of knowledge that ultimately shapes virtuous behavior. This notion aligns with Janna Thomson’s (1998) view that ethical judgments are personal and limited, underscoring the importance of continuous inquiry in navigating complex moral landscapes.

We also argue that, in tandem, Wright’s conceptualization of humility as “an epistemically and ethically aligned state of awareness” (2019) in which we, by “quieting” our own impulses, are able to apprehend other realities. Humility involves recognizing the incompleteness of one’s understanding and embracing the idea that there is always more to learn, even when one reaches the highest levels of both intellectual and moral creativity.

An individual who can deliberately cultivate the virtues of curiosity and humility will be best equipped to ensure creative flourishing – to nurture a deeper engagement with the world, to enhance one’s capacity for ethical development, to navigate the complexities of moral life, and to envision possibilities and modes of expression that would otherwise be obscured. Interconnected as creativity is with these two virtues, this project then suggests that creativity should be considered among the essential pillars of ethical development in everyday situations, as well as in specific professional domains such as science and art, oriented toward the common good.

Creativity is not solely an intellectual virtue typical of geniuses in art or science; it can also be moral. The more we face certain challenges, the more we, as creative ethical individuals, come to realize the limitations of our knowledge and the importance of remaining open to new perspectives.

Rethinking Personal and Work-Related Employee Well-Being: Compassionate Leadership as a Job Resource

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Organizations increasingly recognize the relevance of employee well-being in fostering motivation, resilience, and sustained performance, making it a key area of focus in organizational research (Kun & Gadanez, 2022). Leadership behaviors are essential in shaping workplace experiences, particularly those that provide psychological support and recognition of employees' emotional needs (West & Chowla, 2017).

In this regard, compassionate leadership characterized by the ability to notice, acknowledge, and respond to employees' challenges may play a crucial role in enhancing employees' personal and work-related well-being. However, few studies have adopted a quantitative approach to examining its specific effects on employee outcomes (Ramachandran et al., 2023; Worline & Dutton, 2017). Building on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Demerouti et al., 2001; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007), this study examines whether compassionate leadership contributes to work engagement through the mediating role of employees' well-being, acting as employees' personal resources.

A sample of 225 Spanish employees (Mean age = 33.5 years, Standard Deviation = 9.38) participated in this study. Com-

passionate leadership was assessed using the Compassion at Work – Leadership Behavior Inventory (Pansini et al., submitted), while well-being was measured with the WHO-5 Well-Being Index (WHO, 1998). Work engagement was evaluated through the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-ultra short (UWES-3) (Schaufeli et al., 2017). The mediation model was tested using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), demonstrating a satisfactory fit to the data: $\chi^2(55) = 1989.0$, $p < .001$, CFI = 0.984, TLI = 0.978, RMSEA = 0.059 (95% CI = 0.036–0.080, $p = 0.244$), SRMR = 0.034.

The results confirmed that well-being fully mediated the relationship between compassionate leadership and engagement, emphasizing that leadership behaviors promote work engagement only through the positive influence of employees' subjective well-being. Lastly, the findings align with the JD-R Model, indicating that compassionate leadership may serve as a job resource, while well-being can be viewed as a personal resource, which, in turn, enhances employee engagement.

Kant and Schiller on Character as Inner Harmony

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This paper aims to compare Kant's and Schiller's views on the development of moral character, with a focus on the coordination of emotions with reason. Schiller argues that the sensible nature of human beings should constitute a "collaborating party" in realizing morality. The aesthetic element is crucial both in order not to leave out a dimension of the agent, the emotional one, which is constitutive of her human nature, and to make morality effective.

For Schiller, moral perfection entails a character where duty is fulfilled naturally and joyfully. Only in this way can the agent manifest the grace of a "beautiful soul." Schiller and several scholars contend that this harmonious account is absent in Kant's ethics, in which moral perfection is achieved through a dark path of mortification of the body, culminating in the establishment of a "monarchy" of reason. Not only do emotions have no moral value, but they constitute a threat to the autonomy of the Kantian agent, who, if she heeded emotions, would end up determining herself heteronomously. This perspective is alienating for human agents, as it strips them of a significant part of what constitutes their specific identity. Moreover, such a model would be psychologically unfeasible, given empirical

studies in cognitive sciences showing the constitutive presence of emotions in human moral experience.

This paper challenges such interpretations, arguing that Kant's account of the development of moral character aligns closely with Schiller's, particularly in their shared ideal of inner harmony. As Kant himself reminds Schiller, duty must be grounded in reason's legislation. Nevertheless, the legislation of reason and the legislation of emotions are not necessarily in opposition. Instead, emotions are an integral part of the Kantian agent's moral experience and are often fundamental in fulfilling specific moral duties. What matters is the relationship the agent chooses to develop between emotions and reason. Kant's ethics can thus be interpreted as an ethics of character that does not require the exclusion of emotions but rather the development of internal unity and harmony within the agent.

Once I have clarified the non-intrinsically conflicting nature of emotions in Kant, I focus on moral character and examine the parallels between Kant's emphasis on the necessary presence of both a specific "conduct of thought" (*Denkungsart*) and a specific "conduct of sensibility" (*Sinnesart*), and Schiller's necessary integration of "dignity" as the imposition of the mind and "grace" as the aesthetic dimension of action. For both authors, the highest good calls for a coordination of the emotional life with duty, and the realized agent is the one who presents a harmonious character that enables her to realize morality easily and in a unitary way.

*Does Love of a Self-Transcendent Ideal
Advance or Undermine Well-Being
or Flourishing?*

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I will explore the ancient account of love (*erōs*) of the beautiful and noble (*to kalon*) and to what extent there are analogous studies of it today (hence why my title has “self-transcendent ideal” rather than “the beautiful and noble,” which is not a common expression today). I will focus on the conference theme of philosophical and psychological accounts of virtue, well-being, and flourishing, including whether well-being and flourishing diverge for certain virtuous individuals or in general. To explore this topic, my primary but not exclusive focus will be on studies of the moral implications of devotion to artistic production.

Kristjánsson (2020) offers an extensive account of theories of virtue, well-being, eudaimonistic well-being, and flourishing, subjective and objective, with a specific view to awe-inspiring experiences of transcendence. I oversimplify, but the upshot is this: There may be experiences so powerful that our devotion to them cultivates virtue and profound flourishing (e.g., in experiences of religious ecstasy, revolutionary activity, or artistic production, cf. Annas, 2011) while sacrificing recognizable elements of well-being (e.g., comfort, wealth, friends, etc.).

We find descriptions of this among the ancients. Aristotle (2011) writes of the serious (*spoudaios*) political person: “he does many things for the sake of both his friends and his fatherland, and even dies for them if need be: he will give up money, honors, and, in general, the goods that are fought over, thereby securing for himself what is noble [*to kalon*].” Plato (1991, 2001) presents similar accounts with respect to the philosopher and the poet as well as the politician. And Thucydides (2008) associates love of the beautiful and noble with the Athenian ability to endure tribulation and to advance learning, liberty, artistic genius, and authentic friendship between citizens.

While there are differences in their accounts (e.g., Aristotle does not speak of *erōs* in this context, whereas Plato and Thucydides do), there are important similarities: Certain individuals – virtuously? – sacrifice well-being to flourish, but their sacrifices can contribute to both the well-being and flourishing of communities in terms of learning, culture, and social harmony. But Plato and Thucydides in particular see a dark side to *erōs*: Too often, the real-world action of “great” religious figures, revolutionaries, and artists provoke controversy, sometimes even horror.

For more contemporary work, in addition Kristjánsson, I will review psychological theories of morally-salient transcendence (e.g., Garcia-Romeu, 2010; Kohlberg, 1981; Maslow, 1971). I will also discuss research on how devotion to art contributes to moral virtue (Regelski, 1998) and well-being beyond normal psychological metrics (Kim, Zeppenfeld, & Cohen, 2013; cf. Barenboim, 2009); the relationship between sublimation, faith, and creativity (Kim, Zeppenfeld, & Cohen, 2013); and reconstructed psychological studies of historical artists (Jareño, 2021). Finally, I will consider related concepts in philosophy and psychology, including the importance of meaning (Frey & Vogler, 2018), vocation (Annas, 2011), flow (Sawyer, 1992), etc.

I wish to facilitate a discussion about a tricky topic: Are there some people or life aspirations that challenge us to transform our understanding of well-being and flourishing and perhaps therefore of virtue?

Flourishing within Vulnerability: A Phenomenological Insight

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In recent philosophical discourse as well as in everyday life, flourishing has emerged as a concept of growing importance. Often linked to psychological well-being, it seems to encompass essential features such as personal satisfaction, emotional balance, and psychological stability, while also engaging a deeper existential dimension.

This broader view allows us to pose a key question: is it still possible to flourish when conditions typically considered essential to well-being – such as physical health or emotional stability – are absent? We argue that it is indeed possible, and that this question translates into asking whether a genuinely human form of flourishing can exist even amid physical or psychological suffering. Our aim is to develop an account of flourishing that understands vulnerability not as a limitation to overcome, but as constitutive of the human condition – thus as the very ground from which meaningful human flourishing can arise.

To develop this perspective, we draw on Alasdair MacIntyre's *Dependent Rational Animals*, where he explores a theme underdeveloped in his earlier work: human beings are not only rational and autonomous, but also vulnerable – susceptible to bodily, emotional, and social afflictions. This inherent fragili-

ty underscores our reciprocal dependence. Building on MacIntyre's reflections – who also notes that this view is often underacknowledged in dominant moral philosophy – we interpret vulnerability as a fundamental human characteristic, arising from the interconnectedness of our dependence, rationality, and animality.

The second part of the paper engages phenomenological perspectives to establish a dialogue between this tradition and MacIntyre's virtue ethics. Our aim is to root the concept of a virtuous moral life – implicit in the notion of flourishing – in the lived, embodied, and unique experience of the individual. This approach highlights how flourishing is not merely a theoretical ideal, but an existential reality shaped by our bodily and relational situatedness. Drawing on her personal experience, the phenomenologist S. Kay Toombs helps us see that, in situations of deep suffering, the subjective dimension often becomes most relevant.

Finally, we consider the work of J. Ladrière, a phenomenologist who identifies embodiment, coexistence, and lived temporality – core aspects of our vulnerable nature – as key criteria for determining whether an environment is humanly habitable. We suggest that these categories translate what MacIntyre deems essential for human flourishing: the need for a shared space in which our animality, vulnerability, and dependence are not denied but rather recognized and affirmed.

In this sense, flourishing ceases to be an abstract ideal and becomes a lived possibility – realizable not despite fragility, but through it. Attending to these dimensions is essential for ensuring that the human environment remains habitable – even under conditions of extreme fragility, as in palliative care – and thus conducive to a disposition toward flourishing.

*Pleasure and Flourishing:
A Humean Perspective on Happiness*

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Defining happiness is very difficult. The concept describes an experience – being happy – that many of us feel once in a while. Yet, many definitions describe happiness from different angles. In this paper, I shall focus on two distinct definitions. On the one hand, happiness corresponds to a mental state of pleasure that characteristically follows a desire's fulfilment. This first kind of happiness, which I shall call hedonistic, has been ascribed to authors such as classical utilitarians like Bentham and Mill. On the other hand, the Hellenistic and Aristotelian traditions are committed to defending a thicker concept of happiness, called eudaimonia, which entails the search for good ends and the corresponding means with the ultimate goal of achieving personal flourishing and a good life.

The paper aims to assess the debate from a Humean perspective and try to decide on which side Hume's position should be placed on. I argue that both aspects are present in Hume's philosophical works.

Berry noticed that hedonistic happiness is present when Hume describes prosperous and industrial society as the happiest. The pleasure from material desires' satisfaction plays a central role in human happiness. Pleasure, indeed, has a place in

Hume's morals. One of the most explicit definitions of virtue he gives, i.e. agreeable or useful mental qualities, relies on the feeling of pleasure that we feel when contemplating a virtuous character, suggesting a connection between virtue, pleasure and happiness. Nonetheless, he seems also committed to more eudemonistic claims when he describes some features of happiness that go beyond pleasure and desires, such as peace of mind or integrity.

My take is that these two different aspects of happiness shouldn't be taken as incompatible alternatives. On the contrary, hedonistic happiness describes how we react to the impulse of our passions and desires. As Hume writes, pleasure is the "chief spring or actuating principle of the human mind" and in their absence we are incapable of action or desire and incapable of joy."

Nonetheless, the description of pleasure as the main motivation to act and feel joy is insufficient. We would lack the capacity to evaluate our desires and reflectively consider, for example, the conflict between different desires. Therefore, a more normative account of happiness, such as eudaimonia, plays a role when evaluating which desires are appropriate and which are not. As Hume writes at the end of the Second Enquiry, "Inward peace of mind, consciousness of integrity, a satisfactory review of our own conduct; these are circumstances very requisite to happiness".

In conclusion, I argue that both hedonistic and eudemonistic accounts of happiness play a role, respectively descriptive and normative, in Hume's account.

Declining Fertility Rates and the Happiness of Procreation in Naturalistic Virtue Ethics

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Recent empirical studies suggest that the marginal increase in subjective well-being from having a third child compared to having only two is minimal. Consequently, a well-informed homo economicus might deem it irrational to have more than two children and instead focus on other fulfilling activities. In fact, fertility rates in developed countries have fallen below 2.1 children per woman – the number needed to keep the population stable. Despite immense political efforts to encourage higher birth rates in some countries, no strategy has successfully stabilized these rates apart from allowing mass migration from developing countries. But would a gradual extinction of the human species due to declining birth rates even be inherently problematic, especially if one grants the premise that smaller families generally tend to be happier than larger ones.

This paper does not focus on the moral dimension or realism of such a scenario. Instead, I use it as a thought experiment to explore the concept of happiness within the framework of naturalistic virtue ethics, particularly as articulated by Philippa Foot and Rosalind Hursthouse. Following the Aristotelian tradition, I distinguish between objective human flourishing (eudaimonia) – understood as a normative concept – and sub-

jective well-being, which is empirically measurable through individual self-reports.

My central thesis is that a social order that leads to human extinction, for example by fostering or solidifying unsustainable dynamics, undermines the attribution of eudaimonia to individuals who sustain such an order uncritically. I argue that the life-form concept, from which ethical standards are derived in neo-Aristotelian naturalism, presupposes self-sustainability as a formal requirement to attribute validity to any catalogue of virtues. Furthermore, achieving the status of human flourishing (or eudaimonia) depends on developing these virtues and to live accordingly.

This requirement of the life-form's sustainability is not affected by the rational nature of the human being because even our speciestypical form of rationality must be interpreted in the context of our life-form. Therefore, to achieve the status of eudaimonia or human flourishing requires a way of living that is compatible with such a self-sustainable life-form. Conversely, freeloading by undermining a functional, self-sustainable society, even if it may lead to higher levels of subjective well-being, is neither a proper expression of human rationality nor can it lead to eudaimonia.

Since human beings possess rationality and often have the ability to adapt to problems in a variety of ways, this formal requirement of a life-form's sustainability does not necessarily mandate procreation for every individual capable of it, especially in a world that some consider to be overpopulated. Nonetheless, the pursuit of eudaimonia requires a commitment to sustainable living and the promotion of the society's functionality and sustainability. This implies developing character dispositions that enable individuals to willingly forgo some aspects of subjective well-being when necessary, which should be recognized as a new, life-form-related virtue. Per-

mitting the extinction of the human species due to persistently low birth rates would reflect a lack of character virtues and is incompatible with human flourishing.

Going Beyond the Management of Physical Pain: Flourishing in Chronic Female Diseases

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Is it possible to achieve a state of optimal well-being, in which an individual experiences a full development of one's potential and a sense of meaning and purpose in life, when suffering from a chronic illness?

Vulvodynia is a medical pathology characterized by chronic idiopathic pain that persists for at least three months, and which manifests itself with symptoms such as burning, pins and needles, itching and sensation of irritation in the vulvar area. Living with such a pathology undermines mental balance and affects the quality of life of the person suffering from it. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the psychological sphere in the treatment of vulvodynia. From a careful analysis of the scientific literature, it emerges that personality traits play a role in the perception of pain among women with vulvodynia and that this understanding could be useful in the development of future therapeutic approaches for the management of symptoms. In addition, from the perspective of Positive Psychology, it is interesting to consider some protective psychological factors that can guarantee a better illness experience for those suffering from vulvodynia. Among all, Flourishing.

The concept of Flourishing refers to an optimal state of psychological, emotional and social well-being and indicates the full realization of the individual's personal and relational potential. In the context of chronic disease, Flourishing can be significantly impaired, as persistent pain limits and compromises the sense of purpose, the ability to maintain meaningful relationships, and the ability to participate in personally rewarding activities. However, some people suffering from chronic pain manage to maintain high levels of psychological well-being, through the adoption of adaptive strategies.

In the present research, 161 women suffering from vulvodynia were recruited through the contribution of the Cistite.info Association through self-report questionnaires administered online in the period from June to December 2024. The aim of the present study was to evaluate, in a sample of women diagnosed with vulvodynia, the role of personality traits and well-being, considering the role of protective psychological factors.

The evaluation of Flourishing, through the Mental Health Continuum-Short Form questionnaire, represents a significant change in the approach to the management of vulvodynia, favoring an integrated therapeutic model that takes into account the overall well-being of patients. This approach allows us to go beyond the mere management of physical pain, aiming to promote a meaningful life despite the limitations posed by the disease.

Beyond Borders: Reimagining Well-Being through Global Perspectives on Relationality

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Well-being is a capacious concept with discrepancy in definitions and measures varying significantly across both culture and discipline. Predominant research has largely focused on WEIRD (Western, Education, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) populations, producing frameworks and metrics limited in scope and applicability due to their lack of universality and theoretical foundation. While evidence suggests that conceptualizations of flourishing differ across cultural contexts, systematic explorations of these differences – and potential unifying themes – remain scarce.

This study aimed to bridge this gap by enhancing understanding of a global, multidimensional conceptualization of flourishing. This aim yielded further questions on the depth within each of these dimensions. We interviewed a purposive sample of ten psychologists from the Global Psychology Alliance as representatives of diverse regions traditionally underrepresented in wellbeing literature (Jamaica, Ukraine, Macedonia, Guatemala, China, Ghana, Indonesia, Lebanon, Uganda, and Ecuador) for insights into culturally grounded views of flourishing. Initial data analysis followed a grounded theory approach of constant comparison and open, axial, and selective coding to develop an overall model of global flourishing.

Preliminary findings highlighted both universal and culturally specific dimensions of well-being. Ubiquitous themes such as the importance of meeting basic material needs and the role of community (both including and transcending interpersonal relationships) emerged across all contexts. Spirituality and environmental factors also surfaced, though their definitions and perceived importance varied widely. Notably, relationality emerged as the most prominent theme, with all ten participants emphasizing the centrality of relationships – both at the microsystemic level (e.g., familial and close interpersonal connections) and the macrosystemic level (e.g., broader community and societal ties).

Many spoke to the relationship which exists between the individual or the community and their natural world environments as well. In light of this, further grounded theory analysis into the values and definitions of relationships as a culturally bounded construct will be conducted (and completed by May 31st) on this data set to derive a theoretical framework that captures their role in the process of living well.

Some participants emphasize the interconnectedness of the self and others, asserting that individual flourishing is inseparable from the well-being of the broader community. This interconnectedness underscores the complexity of relationality as a globally significant construct and highlights the importance of approaching it with cultural sensitivity and nuance.

By engaging with diverse cultural perspectives, this study aims to articulate a more inclusive and ethically grounded theory of the role relationships play in well-being that transcends traditional Western paradigms. In doing so, it raises questions about the reliability of well-being assessments across diverse populations, the cultural contingency of eudaimonic frameworks, and the dynamic interplay between individual flourishing and collective well-being. This study advances

the conversation on how psychological accounts of well-being can meaningfully integrate cultural dimensions into globally relevant frameworks.

*Bridging Philosophy and Neuroscience:
Akrasia and Addiction in the Light of
Predictive Processing*

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Akrasia, as described by Aristotle, represents a state where an agent acts against his better judgment, failing to fulfill its virtues and thus its eudaimonia. This Aristotelian description offers a compelling lens through which to analyze addiction, a condition where agents repeatedly prioritize harmful behaviors despite contrary intentions. Our work seeks to bridge ancient philosophical inquiries into akrasia with modern neuroscience and computational modeling, particularly in the context of addiction.

On the personal level, an akratic agent epitomizes a conflict between intention and action, where rational deliberation is overridden by impulsive behavior. On the neural level, we investigate addiction through three paradigms: Predictive Processing (PP), Reinforcement Learning (RL), and Arbitration Modeling. Predictive Processing highlights the role of aberrant precision-weighting in prediction errors, leading to maladaptive behaviors. Reinforcement Learning, especially model-free mechanisms, explains the habitual responses driven by dopaminergic reinforcement. Arbitration modeling examines the dynamic interplay between model-based and model-free strategies, demonstrating how impaired arbitra-

tion – often linked to weakened connectivity in circuits such as the vLPFC-putamen – can exacerbate addiction. However, the philosophical implications of these models remain partially underexplored.

We argue that *akrasia* serves as a conceptual bridge, linking subpersonal explanatory mechanisms to personal-level description of experiences of conflict and failure of self-control. By synthesizing philosophical and neuroscientific perspectives, we propose a framework that not only deepens our understanding of addiction but also enriches the philosophical discourse on agency, decision-making, and virtue.

This interdisciplinary approach underscores the importance of integrating computational and neural models with normative frameworks, fostering a dialogue that moves beyond descriptive accounts of addiction. In doing so, it opens avenues for both theoretical insights and practical applications, emphasizing how philosophical concepts like *akrasia* can inform and be informed by neuroscientific findings.

From Crisis to Flourishing: The Role of Positive Disintegration in Understanding Well-Being

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In the Aristotelian tradition, eudaimonia is understood not as a fixed state but as a dynamic and ongoing process of character development, rooted in humanity's natural capacities and achieved through the cultivation of moral virtues. The goal of the good life is to engage in meaningful activities that are both objectively valuable and subjectively fulfilling, thereby actualizing one's unique potential. This eudaimonistic perspective places significant emphasis on moral, intellectual, and social growth, with phronesis (practical wisdom) serving as its guiding principle. However, it can be argued that any process of growth requires an initial moment of discomfort – whether it is as minor as recognizing one's own flaws or, in the case of significant transformations, as profound as enduring a personal crisis.

According to Polish psychologist Kazimierz Dąbrowski, character and personality are not innate traits but potentialities that every individual has the capacity to develop. He identified distinct levels of human development, with the lowest characterized by a personality dominated by biological impulses and a strong social drive to conform. At the opposite end of the spectrum, he envisioned individuals unbound by societal

expectations – visionaries who achieve a harmonious balance between their personal worldview and purposeful actions.

Dąbrowski proposed that the path to personality development involves a temporary state of breakdown – a positive disintegration. This state manifests as mental dissonance, shame, dissatisfaction with oneself, or a sense of conflict between one's values and the reality of one's life and actions. The resolution of this disintegration is not predetermined – it depends on each individual's choices. To reach higher levels of character development, one must confront personal flaws with honesty and embrace the inherent instability and disharmony of the process.

Dąbrowski pictured this transformative journey as an existential crisis – a state where one's sense of self is similar to a scattered collection of blocks. Reconstructing a new and more integrated personality from these fragments requires strength, determination, and a clearly defined set of values. Only by embracing this challenge can one rebuild their identity in a form that aligns more closely with their highest potential.

One way to encounter a purposeful existential crisis is through Socratic questioning at any stage of education. This method challenges fundamental beliefs and behaviors, inducing doubt that can spark introspection and transformation. While individuals are exposed to numerous potential catalysts for positive disintegration, not everyone is sufficiently attuned to recognize these opportunities or prepared to embrace the changes they may inspire.

It is also important to note that not every personal crisis needs to be as profound or transformative as, for example, St. Paul's Damascus experience. There exists a wide spectrum of micro-crises – smaller, less dramatic episodes – that, when experienced collectively, can foster significant growth in character and personality. These fragmentary moments of dissonance

and reflection may ultimately guide an individual toward deeper self-awareness and development.

In my presentation, I will explore the key principles of Dąbrowski's theory of positive disintegration and identify its relationship with neo-Aristotelian accounts of human flourishing. I will then examine how this perspective can deepen our understanding of eudaimonia as an evolving process and discuss its potential applications in the context of promoting well-being.

It can be argued that adopting a specific approach to personal crises – one that views them as an initial stage in a process of positive transformation – can play an important role in fostering self-growth and personal development.

4 Challenges 4 Well-Being: Assessing the Program Efficacy Among a Group of Italian University Students

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In the context of the growing psychological distress and the rise of dysfunctional behaviours among university students, the Italian national programme PRO.BEN has supported coordinated actions to promote wellbeing across universities and AFAM institutions. The University of Foggia, as the leading institution of one of the funded projects, has developed an integrated pathway that connects empirical research with counseling practices, aiming to prevent drop-out, foster engagement, and promote more inclusive and caring learning environments. This keynote presents the main research findings and practical outcomes achieved through this multi-year experience.

The first part of the talk summarizes a cross-sectional study involving more than 300 students from the University of Foggia. Using a standardized battery (measuring academic engagement, subjective wellbeing, behavioural addictions, and drop-out intentions) and latent profile analyses, we identified three distinct groups along the engagement continuum: Disengaged, Moderately Engaged, and Highly Engaged. Students with high engagement showed greater wellbeing and relational resilience, lower drop-out intentions, and fewer problematic behaviours; conversely, those with low engagement presented

higher vulnerability, especially to gaming-related risks, while differences in problematic social media use were less pronounced. These findings confirm academic engagement as a protective factor and highlight the need for tailored interventions rather than “one-size-fits-all” approaches, enabling universities to design preventive actions aligned with different student trajectories.

The second section discusses clinical and educational implications for university psychological services. Three key areas of good practice are presented:

Access and outreach: expansion of counselling desks, brief evidence-based interventions, and dedicated spaces for “digital detox”; Outcome monitoring: continuous assessment focused on wellbeing, academic functioning, and drop-out risk; Professional development: training in psychological assessment, stepped-care interventions, and interprofessional teamwork.

University counselling thus emerges as a strategic hub for fostering autonomy, self-awareness, and personal growth throughout academic life, aligning with national and international standards for quality psychological care in higher education.

Drawing on gender studies, the keynote also proposes a cultural reframing of care. Traditionally, “care” has been socially assigned to women – from domestic management to the emotional maintenance of relationships – while “non-care” has been normalized as a masculine habitus centred on performance and denial of vulnerability. This asymmetry generates differential access to help-seeking behaviours and distinct risk profiles, intersecting with institutional designs (services, schedules, spaces) that implicitly presuppose pre-existing care competencies. Therefore, the promotion of wellbeing cannot be reduced to the provision of services; it must entail the institutionalization of shared practices of care, involving all genders and countering the loneliness and hyper-individualism that

feed psychological vulnerability and compensatory behaviours. In this sense, care – slow, demanding, collective – becomes a transformative practice in the everyday life of the university.

In conclusion, we present a replicable research-action model integrating psychosocial profiling, counselling services, and an institutional ethics of care. Investing in engagement, building gender-neutral care cultures, and systematically monitoring outcomes are essential levers for reducing distress, preventing drop-out, and enabling human flourishing within academic communities.

Wisdom and Eudaimonia: Integrating Theoretical and Practical Wisdom

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This presentation offers an integrative account of wisdom that encompasses both *sophia* and *phronesis*. We describe our approach as integrative for two main reasons. First, it draws upon both philosophical and psychological perspectives. Second, it seeks to articulate a more fundamental notion than the traditional distinction between theoretical and practical wisdom, namely wisdom *per se*.

We understand wisdom as including the following:

- (1) sensitivity to what is important (to know, to love, or to do),
- (2) motivation to pursue such knowledge and act,
- (3) the capacity to comprehend, or at least to interpret intelligently, the world (including the realm of values),
- (4) the capacity to reflect on what one already knows (understands), leading to openness to new knowledge or deepening what one already knows,
- (5) and the ability to act in accordance with one's knowledge, especially the knowledge of the good. Such ability encompasses the application of general truths to particular contexts.

Two particular issues will receive our special attention: a) the dependence of the concept of wisdom on underlying ontological assumptions, since understandings of wisdom vary signifi-

cantly depending on whether one posits a nihilistic world or a reality structured by objective goods and evils; b) W.D. Ross's idea of *prima facie* and *pro tanto* duties as objects of wise insight, where the former, being general and moral, seems to be more closely aligned with *sophia* than with *phronesis*.

Having delineated the concept of wisdom, we will consider whether wisdom is merely instrumental to *eudaimonia*, or whether it is an integral part of it. We will argue in favour of the latter view: that wisdom is a constitutive component of *eudaimonia*.

On Passive Well-Being: The Value of Depending on Nature and Its Practical Implications

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A Japanese psychiatrist, Takeo Doi, proposed a notion of *amae* to capture a positive aspect of human dependency (Doi, 1981, 1992). Psychiatrists, sociologists, and jurists have discussed the scope and implications of this notion to explicate the value of human dependency in humane social relationships (Johnson, 1993; Hafen & Hafen, 1994; Morita, 2015). More recently, philosophical and neuroscientific analyses of this notion have also been presented, arguing that the notion of *amae* – human dependency – helps us to understand the value of “being loved” in human relationships (Tachibana, 2024a, 2024b). However, it remains uncertain whether or not such a dependent feature is (or should be) limited to human relationships when considering what human well-being is.

In this presentation, making use of Doi’s notion of *amae*, I argue that dependency has a moral value when it applies to the relationship with nature. First, I survey the literature that overtly or covertly refers to human dependency on nature, including Japanese classics and psychological studies, and extract the notion of depending on nature. Second, I analyse how dependent relationships between humans and nature contribute to understanding the moral nature of humans by referring

to the notion of *amae*. Third, as a practical implication of this analysis, I consider the case of climate modification.

Examining an ethical guideline for climate modification research that the largest geophysical association recently published, saying that the ethics of such modification require “respect for nature” (AGU, 2024), I argue that “respecting” will not sufficiently capture the desirable relationship between humans and nature and then propose that admitting a depending on nature will restore such relationship.

I conclude this: given that having a good relationship with nature contributes to human well-being, the notion of dependency on nature helps us understand environmental values, such as climate justice, and what human well-being is in the face of geo-engineering.

Pity and Passion in Punishment: An Analysis of Laws 731b3-d5

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Debates have arisen about whether Plato has developed a new psychology in *Laws*, and if so, a psychology of what kind. Susan Sauvé Meyer (2018) argues that two irreconcilable models – harmony and conflict – co-exist in the psychological picture of *Laws*, especially regarding the relationship between reason and passions. This paper suggests that 731b3-d5, a passage on how psychological tendencies, pity (*eleos*) and anger (*thumos*), should be controlled in cases of punishing the criminals, provides a practical illumination of what harmony and disharmony amount to.

In *Laws* 731b-d, the main character of *Laws*, the Athenian Stranger, argues that a praiseworthy citizen ought to be both gentle (*praon*) and passionate (*thumoeideis*), under the context of punishing criminals. The citizen is suggested to suppress passion and release pity when the wrongdoing is remediable, while suppress pity and release passion when it is not.

What is notable in this case is that the Athenian never suggests that the citizens in Magnesia should be able to theoretically address the reason for pity (“No one does wrong willingly”), a line of thought central to Socratic and Platonic ethics. Instead, he deploys this line of reasoning merely as a practical

tool to incite pity and abate anger. Yet, as Book 9 shows, he (or, the legislators of Magnesia) clearly has an argument that could address “No one does wrong willingly”.

Based on the unaddressed “reason for pity”, I argue that, for a plain citizen in Magnesia, it is not required for reason to provide a comprehensive account that unifies all “reasons of motivations” and thereby guarantees the right action. Rather, reason acts as a regulator, selectively suppressing or releasing passions so that the agent may act appropriately.

This view reflects a shift of focus of Plato’s educational and psychological theory. In the *Republic* (554c-d), reason is presented as capable of “persuading” the passions, bringing them into alignment through rational argument. By contrast, in *Laws*, reason operates more modestly, regulating rather than fully integrating the non-rational parts of the soul. This difference connects to the *Laws*’ broader project: offering a practical, second-best framework for political and individual life.

Catching Character Through Phronetic Teachers

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In response to global crises such as pandemics, armed conflicts, and increasing social fragmentation, education is increasingly called upon to contribute not only to knowledge transmission but also to the promotion of human flourishing.

Drawing on Aristotle's concept of *eudaimonia*, understood as a life of virtuous activity in accordance with reason, this paper argues that the cultivation of virtue should be regarded as a central aim of contemporary education. Within this perspective, character education emerges as a promising framework for integrating ethical development into educational practice.

The Jubilee Centre's model of character education – where character is “caught, taught, and sought” – provides a structured approach to this task. It highlights the formative role of the school environment (“caught”), the importance of explicit moral and civic instruction (“taught”), and the active engagement of students in the pursuit of moral goods (“sought”). Central to this model is the role of teachers, not merely as transmitters of knowledge, but as moral exemplars whose conduct and judgment shape students' ethical development.

Building on this insight, the paper proposes that teachers must embody *phronesis* (practical wisdom), understood as the capacity to navigate complex moral situations with sensitivity and sound judgment. *Phronesis* is analyzed through four core, interrelated skills: moral perception, moral deliberation, emotion regulation, and moral motivation. These capacities enable educators to recognize ethically salient features of situations, weigh competing values, regulate affective responses, and act in accordance with well-formed moral commitments.

The analysis is further grounded in the Aretai Center's model of virtue monism, according to which practical wisdom constitutes the unifying principle of the virtues. From this perspective, the cultivation of *phronesis* is sufficient for moral development, as other virtues can be understood as context-specific expressions of practical wisdom rather than as independently trainable traits. This approach offers a theoretically parsimonious and pedagogically coherent framework for character education.

The paper concludes by advocating the development of targeted training programs in practical wisdom for future teachers. By fostering these core capacities, such programs would enable educators to act as effective moral agents within educational contexts, thereby promoting the formation of students' character and contributing to their overall flourishing.

*Emotional and Ethical Dimensions:
What Connection for Human Flourishing?
Philosophical and Pedagogical Insights
from Plutarch*

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To flourish means “to fulfil one’s potential as human individual” and, according to an Aristotelian theoretical framework, it can be conceived as the goal of life (Kristjánsson, 2015, p. 13). Starting from the assumption that human flourishing can be understood both as an emotional and ethical condition, this contribution questions what connection exists between the emotional and ethical dimensions of experience, and how to cultivate them in order to pursue both well-being and goodness in life.

According to the cognitive theory of emotional experience, advocated in both psychological (Ellis, 1993; Oatley, 1992) and philosophical (Nussbaum, 1994, 2001) fields, emotional experiences are generated by evaluations on the quality of the events. In turn, evaluative acts are formulated on the basis of “value criteria,” which take shape as an answer to the primary ethical question, namely: what is good for life? Or, formulated in Aristotelian terms: in what does a good life consist? If the variation of emotional experiences depends on the variation of the value criteria on the basis of which we evaluate events, then it is evident that emotional and ethical dimensions are strictly connected.

This connection is particularly highlighted in Plutarch's texts, where it is possible to find insights for an educational proposal capable of bridging emotional education with ethical education. Plutarch remains faithful to the Platonic view of the soul, which is conceived to be subjected to the struggle between a rational cognitive component and an irrational passionate one; however, while considering thoughts and emotions as expressions of two different parts of the soul (*Of moral virtue*, 442a), Plutarch establishes a close relationship between them (*ibid.*, 443c), since he attributes to thoughts the capacity to make emotions the subject of reasoning, exercising a transformative action on them.

Plutarch conceptualizes well-being as a condition of “*euthumía*,” a term for a good condition of the soul, translatable as tranquility or, better, serenity. This condition, which expresses a good quality of life, can only be cultivated if we engage in a continuous and repeated exercise of thinking (*Of the tranquillity of the mind*, 465b), capable of retracing the criteria of value with which we evaluate the situations we face.

Since the possibility of living well is closely related to how reasoning is constructed (*ibid.*, 466d), it is essential to cultivate those ways of thinking that Plutarch calls “healthy” thoughts (*ibid.*, 470d).

By analyzing his texts, it is possible to reconstruct those ways of thinking, which are fundamental to be cultivated in order to aspire to human flourishing: 1) to devote attention to what is essential; 2) to deactivate the acquisitive tension; 3) to accept reality; 4) to be grateful; 5) to seek for the right measure; 6) to analyze the experience. Finally, in order to pursue a good quality of life, in Plutarch's theoretical framework, it is essential to act according to virtue.

Emotional Well-Being and Flourishing

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Happiness, as explored by Arnold through Strasser's analysis, is a complex and multifaceted concept transcending mere satisfaction or pleasure. While happiness relates to joy and serenity, it embodies the fulfillment of the whole personality rather than specific desires. Strasser highlights that happiness entails a continuous possession of the good, symbolizing infinity and eternity, achieved through the integration of various positive emotions such as joy, serenity, and enjoyment. Arnold aligns with a eudaimonic perspective, suggesting happiness involves striving toward self-ideal and flourishing through virtuous habits fostered by positive emotions.

Arnold further contrasts fleeting joys with enduring happiness, emphasizing its dynamic quality of renewal and discovery. Joy, as described, involves an exultant state of assured possession of the good, while serenity represents a quiet security in the good. Together, they elucidate happiness as an enduring disposition rather than a passive state. Borrowing from Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory, positive emotions enable personal growth and resilience, aligning with Arnold's focus on flourishing as a psychological and moral aspiration.

Arnold bridges emotional well-being with broader existential and psychological inquiries. She critiques purely hedonic interpretations, favoring an approach that considers happiness as an emotional condition encompassing deep psychological dimensions, akin to Haybron's theory of emotional well-being. This view opposes transient pleasures, positing happiness as a psychic affirmation of life through active engagement, commitment, and love. Furthermore, Arnold underscores happiness as a process of striving toward meaningful goals, often catalyzed by overcoming negative emotions such as boredom.

The text integrates perspectives from Positive Psychology, emphasizing the role of subjective evaluation and the balance of emotional conditions in determining happiness. Csikszentmihalyi's alignment with Aristotle underscores happiness as a virtuous activity shaped by psychological states, while Diener and Biswas-Diener stress satisfaction across life domains for flourishing. In synthesizing these views, happiness emerges as a pursuit shaped by individual psychological orientations and existential projects, regarding objective categories, though transcending them.

An Interdisciplinary Approach to the Study of Human Flourishing

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Since the pioneering article “Human Flourishing: On the Scope of Moral Inquiry,” numerous studies have examined the relationship between virtuous moral character and flourishing. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle explained moral virtue as a disposition to think, feel, and act “at the right times, about the right things, toward the right people, for the right end, and in the right way” (NE 1106b21–24). The Aristotelian assertion that moral virtues are essential components of a eudaimonic life is widely acknowledged, and many neo-Aristotelian philosophers have emphasized this point in recent years (Badhwar, 2014; Kristjánsson, 2020; MacIntyre, 2007).

Drawing on Aristotle’s concept of eudaimonia, positive psychology has produced a wealth of literature on human flourishing. Eudaimonic psychologists propose more comprehensive ways of assessing an individual’s well-being than mere subjective measures of happiness (Ryff & Singer, 2006). Keyes highlighted the significance of social well-being based on an individual’s satisfaction with their cultural and social environment (Keyes, 2007). According to the PERMA theory, human flourishing is defined by five elements: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement (Selig-

man, 2011). Recently, the Flourish Index has also included character and virtue in its measurements of human flourishing (Weziak-Bialowolska, McNeely, VanderWeele, & Topa, 2019).

However, although knowledge plays a vital role in the classical worldview and eudaimonia involves fulfilling human nature, the influence of intellectual virtues on eudaimonia has surprisingly received little attention in contemporary research. Zagzebski had already realized this shortcoming by the late nineties (1996, p. 200). Noting this gap, preliminary empirical studies have recently been conducted on Argentine adolescents relating a virtuous intellectual character with flourishing (Mesurado & Vanney, 2025).

This work aimed to expand the scope of research on human flourishing by proposing intellectual well-being as a distinct dimension of it. It includes an empirical validation of a flourishing scale with four well-being dimensions: emotional, psychological, social, and intellectual. On the one hand, it broadens the understanding of the nature of human flourishing by incorporating the deployment of intellectual capacity, which had notably not been included in previous formulations. On the other hand, the empirical results show that this new dimension integrates consistently within the multidimensional structure of flourishing, thus enriching an already established construct.

Well-Being Meets Culture: The Case of the Finnish Sisu

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As well-being has been conceptualized through the lens of English-speaking Western cultures, there is the concern that the resulting concepts of well-being reflect a bias towards Western, and more specifically English language-influence, ways of thinking. In this sense, little attention has been paid to how language and culture, and more specifically, cultural terms related to character, are associated to well-being and human flourishing.

To address this concern and increase this intercultural sensitivity, the study of emotional vocabulary of different cultures is breaking new ground. In that respect, the present study focuses on the notion of Sisu, a Finnish term that denotes the ability to transcend the limits of our preconceived capacities in the face of greater-than-normal challenges.

Sisu is an action mindset that enables us to see beyond our current reality and its limitations and expand our capacities. But, for sisu to be beneficial to us and others, it must be used with practical wisdom and compassion. The Sisu Scale consists of beneficial and harmful sisu factors. Results from a study of 209 Spanish respondents show that sisu is related to well-being, as well as resilience, hope, grit, hardiness, and mental toughness.

Further research should continue exploring the contribution of *sisu* to the understanding of well-being, as well as a means for building character and enhancing human flourishing across different cultures, as *sisu* encompasses a universal capacity.

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*“Quali fioretti” (Inf. II, 127):
Albert the Great and the Via to Virtuous
and Pleasant Flourishing*

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In my talk, I explored the interconnections between happiness as human flourishing, pleasure, and virtue in the ethics of the Dominican theologian and philosopher Albert the Great (c. 1200-1280). Despite drawing on an incredibly vast array of sources – including Neoplatonic and, of course, biblical and Christian ones –, Albert’s aretaic thought is at bottom Aristotelian: in the wake of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the only work by “the Philosopher” he commented on twice, Albert maintains that happiness (*felicitas* or *beatitudo*) is the activity of the soul according to virtue, especially according to the best and most perfect one (cf. *Eth. Nic.*, I, 7, 1098a15-17).

In Albert’s Peripateticism, this virtue is the most “natural” human virtue, that is, the virtue that fundamentally characterizes human nature, namely, contemplative virtue. Thus, for the Dominican, our happiness resides in an intellectual fulfillment. With a striking floral imagery that runs across his output and that seems to anticipate the vocabulary of “blossoming” or “flourishing” highly in vogue in contemporary virtue ethics, Albert qualifies happiness as the *refloritio* or *superfloritio* of human nature. Sometimes this flourishing presents markedly religious connotations, but on several others, it is unmistak-

ably pictured as the goal of philosophical ethics, a goal that human beings can attain, slowly but surely, through their own efforts. Such flourishing is for us the greatest source of pleasure (*delectatio*) and joy (*gaudium*), thus essentially contributing to our well-being.

For Albert, indeed, flourishing is nothing but the condition in which the soul achieves, as it were, maximum peace (*quietatio*), dilation (*dilatatio*, *diffusio*), flexibility, and freedom. Albeit to a lesser extent, this same picture applies to the moral virtues that order the practical life. But Albert is well aware of the potential conflicts, in his Aristotelian ethical system, between the exercise of virtue, on the one hand, and the attainment of pleasure (and happiness), on the other.

The most evident arises in the case of courage. In fact, as Aristotle recognizes, courage primarily pertains to the most fearful thing, that is, death, and in particular to that chosen on the battlefield.

It unavoidably follows that the act of courage is both physically and psychologically painful, which risks casting a dark shadow on the agent's happiness. In an attempt to accommodate pleasure within the dynamics of courage, Albert draws the sharp distinction between the pain of the senses (*tristitia* or *dolor in sensu*) and the pleasure or joy of reason (*delectatio* or *gaudium in ratione*): the former is the pain inevitably experienced in a courageous act, while the latter is the joy that supervenes on the imagination of the beautiful goal that one could obtain by standing one's ground, namely, victory. Therefore, Albert enables us to see how the coexistence of virtue, flourishing, and pleasure can be safeguarded even the direst circumstances.

Political Polarization and Burdened Virtues

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Lisa Tessman's *Burdened Virtues* (2005) explores how non-ideal social conditions can complicate the relationship between virtue and flourishing. Focusing primarily on those who endure and resist oppression, one of Tessman's central insights is that conditions of oppression cause certain virtues to become "burdened", in the sense that they become "disjoined from the bearer's own flourishing" (Tessman 2005: 4). Even if we are generally accepting of the idea of a positive relationship between being virtuous and living a flourishing life (or living a life that is good for you), this positive picture is disrupted when conditions of oppression increase the costs associated with possessing certain virtues. Candidate examples of such burdened virtues discussed by Tessman include sensitivity to the suffering of others, courage, appropriate anger, and loyalty.

In this paper, I consider how other forms of non-ideal social conditions might similarly complicate the relationships between virtue, flourishing and well-being. Focusing on conditions of political polarization, I argue that such conditions can also cause the possession of certain virtues to become negatively associated with their bearer's well-being. Political polarization can be understood as a social state of collectives or

communities, arrived at via a process whereby “differences in a society increasingly align along a single dimension, cross-cutting differences become instead reinforcing, and people increasingly perceive politics and society in terms of ‘Us’ and ‘Them’” (McCoy, Rahman & Somer 2018, cited in Cassam 2020: 213).

Under such conditions, the costs of possessing and exemplifying candidate virtues such as honesty, fair-mindedness, impartiality, and intellectual humility increase to the extent that they can be expected to have a systematically negative impact on their bearer’s well-being. If correct, this would provide further reason to be sceptical of the scope of the view that virtues are, in general, positively related to their bearer’s flourishing. In addition to breaking down for those enduring conditions of oppression (as argued by Tessman and others), the positive view also fails to hold in non-ideal social conditions more generally. If so, we have further reason to take the actual social conditions that are likely to be faced by individuals into account whenever we aim to propose or justify policies or interventions by appealing to a positive connection between virtue and well-being.

*Who Is Afraid of Happiness? On Leo Strauss's
Critique to "Heideggerian" Thymos and the
Erotic Dimension of Eudaimonia*

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Since his 1921 lecture on Augustine's Neoplatonism, Heidegger decisively critiqued the notion of *ordo amoris*, which he regarded as a conceptual framework that reduces *eros* to a calculative logic, thereby stripping it of existential significance (Esposito, 2020). In full alignment with a tendency that originates with Kant's *Grundlegung*, the meaning of a meaningful life emerges as a matter of radical freedom, on the restrictive condition that no certainties are left available.

Nearly fifteen years later, Heidegger would have condemned Platonic *eros* itself (2001: 296), as it signifies the starting point of Western metaphysics and its will-to-certainty, which obstructs a resolute recognition of the enigmatic facet of Being (see also Gonzalez, 2015: 232). Such a belief is widely shared within existentialism and appears to leave no room for a positive conception of *eudaimonia*.

The aim of my contribution, still, is not to historically reconstruct the reasons behind the absence of the concept of *eudaimonia* in Heidegger's thought. Rather, I intend to highlight the problematic aspects of this omission through the critical lens provided by Leo Strauss, which allows Heideggerian reso-

luteness (Zali, 2024) to be situated within a broader eudaimonic framework. In a letter to Seth Benardete, Strauss argues that the philosophy of his master is driven by a thymoeidetic principle (Meier, 2006: 50).

Since thymos is a crystallized manifestation of a specific form of eros, as suggested by the analyses presented in *The City and the Man*, Heidegger's suppression of eros appears to have been only superficial. Indeed, in his lectures on Plato's *Symposium*, Strauss indicates it is impossible to preventively castrate eros, as each human action constitutes an actualisation of this transcendental principle. Eros, as a daimonic drive toward the good, naturally aims for eudaimonia in various forms. Thymos, however, takes a paradoxical path: it strives for happiness while claiming to pursue only honour and recognition (Fussi, 2011). Hence, it attains a hollow form of happiness, rooted in an illusion.

In conclusion, deontological ethical rigorism appears as a variation of a broader eudaimonic framework, into which it shall be integrated. Moreover, as etymology suggests, there is a strong connection between eros and eudaimonia. However, this does not lead to a subjectivist conception of happiness, as it remains necessary to evaluate desires in terms of their inherent logic. Strauss identifies the crucial antinomy in the constitution of the good life as the tension between practical and theoretical reason, exemplified by the debate between the doctrines of Thomas Aquinas and Averroes (2001, 451). He argues in favour of the latter, but is this a correct stance? Eventually, one might rise few questions. Practical reason appears to be tied with thymos, notably a near-equivalent to the Hebrew *leb* or heart. Yet is thymos not the root of *philia*, a bond with a community to which we have emotional ties forged over time? And does *philia* not represent another way of achieving our *entelecheia*?

Human Flourishing and Relational Virtues: An Ethical Perspective on the Gift Paradigm

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This contribution interrogates the ontological and ethical foundations of human flourishing by challenging the purported tension between individual fulfilment and the well-being of others. It argues, through a close reading of Paul Ricoeur's *The Course of Recognition*, that individuation is always co-individuation, unfolding within a continuous flow of relationships. Our very being is forged and sustained through the gift of mutual recognition, an anthropological fact that renders the absence of recognition a profound psychic wound.

In response to the pathologies of a fractured social world – characterised by a simultaneous hunger for recognition and a fragility of social bonds – Ricoeur posits the ceremonial gift, as analysed by Marcel Mauss and Marcel Hénaff, as the paradigmatic model for transforming the struggle for recognition into a sustainable practice of mutual acknowledgement. Moving beyond Mauss's enigma of reciprocity, encapsulated in the Maori concept of *hau*, and Hénaff's thesis that the gift is a foundational act of recognising the other as a social partner, Ricoeur identifies a critical lacuna: the dimension of *agape*. He synthesises the unconditional, non-calculating logic of *agapic* love (the “poetic of love”) with the horizontal, reciprocal logic of social

justice (the “prose of justice”). This integration navigates the fundamental human disproportion – the tension between our finite, vulnerable condition of dependence and our capacity to host the infinite, to act beyond equivalence and expectations.

Ricoeur’s decisive conceptual move is to locate the heart of the gift not in the act of giving, but in the capacity for receiving. The French term *reconnaissance*, signifying both recognition and gratitude, becomes the pivotal concept. Gratitude, as the first gratuity experienced by being welcomed into the world, “lightens the weight of obligation” and reorients the cycle of reciprocity towards generosity. The recipient’s response, when infused with gratitude, is not a calculated counter-gift but a “second-first gift”, a new initiative of generosity that perpetuates a transitive reciprocity directed forward, toward others and future generations.

This dynamic, however, is not confined to the interpersonal sphere. Ricoeur insists that the spirit of the gift must be institutionalised, transfiguring just institutions with the ethos of mutual recognition – what Aristotle termed *philia politikē*. Such institutions, while impersonal, can embody a generative gift that irradiates the social fabric, opening historical possibilities for peace and reconciliation, as exemplified by symbolic political gestures that reshape collective relationships.

The core thesis of this paper is that the gift is not a spontaneous impulse or an isolated gesture, but a cultivated relational virtue. This virtue demands an unceasing work on the self – a hermeneutic process of weaving one’s wounds and history into a coherent narrative – coupled with the development of a moral sense of touch, a phronetic discernment akin to Aristotle’s *phronesis*. This practical wisdom enables agents to navigate the inherent ambivalence of the gift, oscillating between trust and suspicion, and to act with contextual sensitivity.

Ultimately, the gift emerges as a dance of transitive reciprocity, a continuous stream of generosity that, beneath the chaos of the everyday, secretly spins threads of meaning, purpose, and hope, allowing for the imaginative construction of a world otherwise.

The Welfare Principle in the Polish Family Law and Flourishing

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The presentation will take an aretaic perspective on the philosophy of law. The main aim of the venture is to show, how virtue ethics can influence and provide answers to specific, legal problems. My presentation will focus on the question of the meaning of the principle of the child's welfare and how the idea of flourishing can provide a better footing for the answer than other theoretical approaches.

Firstly, I will focus on the Polish legal system as a particular example of how the above-mentioned principle is understood by judiciary and legal scholars. Secondly, I will try to formulate how the principle of the child's welfare can be understood using the idea of human flourishing. Finally, I will compare the newly described understanding of the principle of child welfare with the ones shown in the first part of the presentation and show how the former tackles the problem of the latter. The principle of the child's welfare is indicated as one of the guiding principles of family law.

The Polish legislator has recognised it in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland in Article 72, according to which 'the Republic of Poland shall ensure the protection of the rights of the child'. Similar norms can also be found within internation-

al regulations. The principle of the welfare of the child constitutes a general interpretative directive for family law norms constituting the axiology of this branch of law as a fundamental principle of family law. Despite such great importance, this concept has not been legally defined. In the absence of a so-called legal definition, it is doctrine and jurisprudence that are forced to determine its meaning. The idea of flourishing, understood as the Aristotelian concept of *eudaimonia* can create an interesting alternative to entrenched, legal positions. By distinguishing between the universal and particular aspects of *eudaimonia*, it is possible to identify the objective basis of human goodness, which at the same time indicates its adaptation to particular individuals.

Reformulating the concept of the 'good of the child' in the language of the aretic language will make it possible to indicate not only the criteria which, each time should be taken into account by the interpreter of this general clause but also the particularistic elements that may prove to be relevant to a particular individual (for example in accordance to his: age, social role, cultural and economical background)

*The Cultural, Social,
and Technological Mediators of Phronesis*

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Phronesis, commonly translated to practical wisdom, is an essential intellectual metavirtue that mediates the moral virtues towards the telos of eudaimonia: the ultimate end of a flourishing life (NE VI.12 1144a). Through excellent perception, deliberation, and action, phronesis keeps the end of flourishing in sight and applies reason to guide those moral virtues on how best to stay on target towards that telos. Without phronesis, the other virtues would more often than not miss the mark, or at best get things right only coincidentally and not for the right reasons. In this way, phronesis can be said to be the most important virtue when it comes to achieving flourishing: it is the virtue that keeps ourselves on target towards eudaimonia.

Since phronesis is an essential virtue that the flourishing life is dependent on, a better understanding of how it is developed and how it is expressed should be elucidated. Aristotle's original account of phronesis in the Nicomachean Ethics acknowledged the need for proper experiences in order for phronesis to develop (NE VI.8 1142a), but the importance of the external factors that shape, allow for, or close off opportunities for wise reasoning had not been adequately accounted for.

Work within the psychological study of wisdom, like Grossmann, Dorfman, and Oakes' socio-ecological account (2020), acknowledges that wise reasoning is mediated by cultural, social, and contextual factors, but one missing aspect in this account is how material technology mediates phronesis. The postphenomenological concept of technological mediation, most predominantly developed by philosophers Don Ihde and Peter Paul Verbeek (Ihde 1979; Verbeek 2011), recognizes the important role technology plays in shaping a wide array of human experience, like perception, praxis, and ethics. Through what they call the human-technology relationship, human experience can be understood as being co-constituted by human actors and their material technologies, mediating the way we engage with and act in the world.

Synthesizing the socio-ecological account of wisdom with technological mediation theory, I argue that phronesis is best understood as a human-technology-world relationship, where human actors' ability to develop and apply practical wisdom in their lives is inextricably tied with the social, cultural, and technological components that make up the co-constituted wise reasoner. Practical wisdom should not be understood as the stable person-centric psychological trait of a radically free rational agent acting independently of social and technological influences. Instead, these social and technological mediators need to be acknowledged as a constitutive element of phronesis.

If we have an interest in understanding human flourishing and how it relates to psychological conceptions of well-being, we must first have an understanding of how material technologies and cultural practices come together to mediate practical wisdom. With this understanding in mind, we can better shape our social and material realities to better achieve the flourishing we are ultimately aiming at.

Virtue Ethics as Ethical Hermeneutics for Psychological Practice

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Psychology, in its pursuit of alleviating psychological suffering and promoting well-being, also possesses an intrinsic ethical and teleological dimension. While codes of ethics and guidelines from psychological associations provide essential normative principles, they risk reducing professional ethics to a mere set of abstract rules. This can disconnect ethics from the profession's purposes that should orient practice.

The central thesis is that virtue ethics can offer a hermeneutic lens for reviving the ethical foundation and telos of psychological practice (e.g., counselling, psychotherapy).

This approach enables the psychologist to: a) identify the “internal goods” constituting the ethical structure of their profession; b) develop professional excellence and practical wisdom to realize such goods; c) pursue psychology's aim of promoting human flourishing (for both the professional and the client/patient), not just the alleviation of psychological suffering.

First, I will identify the ethical nature of psychology as a profession and argue that it is a practice ($\pi\rho\tilde{\alpha}\xi\iota\varsigma$ – *praxis*). This means a socially instituted, cooperative activity with coherent and complex forms and relationships, endowed with technical

competencies (MacIntyre, 1998). As praxis, psychology possesses not only external goods (e.g., success, wealth and social prestige) – which do not identify its essence – but above all internal goods. These are value-based goals from which the practice can derive meaning and which can only be realised through the exercise of virtues (Fowers, 2005).

Second, I will examine the code of ethics of the Order of Italian Psychologists to deduce the internal goods that, while not explicitly stated, are implicit within it (2013). A thorough analysis reveals constitutive internal goods such as psychological well-being, self-determination, authentic human relationships, pursuit of scientific knowledge, and professional integrity.

Third, virtue ethics allows interpreting the profession not merely in an instrumentalist sense, but also as a process of cultivating virtues that realize these internal goods. This approach confers an ethical orientation to practice. This virtuous formation can be identified in the ethical decision-making practices of the professionals, where virtue ethics offers a hermeneutic lens. Indeed, virtue ethics provides an understanding of practical wisdom as a virtue that can be recognized or integrated within existing decision-making models applied in psychology (e.g., Knapp & VandeCreek, 2012; Koocher & Keith-Spiegel, 1998). The integration of practical wisdom into these models can serve to develop moral competence and ethical sensitivity over time.

By adopting a virtue ethics framework, the psychologist can continually renew the ethical core of the profession through the internal goods that constitute it. This approach allows them to cultivate professional excellence through *phronesis* and ultimately promote human flourishing in psychosomatic and relational wholeness.

This volume brings together the abstracts of the IX Aretai International Conference on *Human Flourishing, Psychological Well-Being, and Virtue*, held at the European University of Rome from 15 to 17 September 2025, organized by Aretai – Center on Virtue, in collaboration with the PROBEN Project (*4 Challenges 4 Well-Being*), a major national research initiative funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research. The contributions address the need to articulate a more comprehensive account of well-being from a variety of disciplinary and methodological perspectives. They examine the conceptual relationships between flourishing, well-being, and happiness; the role of virtue in shaping both individual lives and social practices; and the conditions under which human capacities can be developed and sustained. Particular attention is devoted to processes of virtue formation and to their implications for fields such as education, healthcare, and public policy. Several contributions also engage with methodological questions, exploring how qualitative and quantitative approaches may be productively combined in the study of human flourishing and well-being. The volume offers an open inquiry, grounded in a careful balance between theoretical reflection and practical application, and aims to foster further research, dialogue, and collaboration towards a deeper understanding of how individuals and communities may genuinely flourish amid the multiple challenges of our time.