When morality hurts...
Moral (Over–)Demandingness

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Peter Singer's article „Famine, Affluence and Morality" gave rise to an ongoing debate on *overdemandingness*. The core of this debate is the objection that a moral theory which issues extreme demands, i.e. demands which conflict with the well-being of the addressee, in this case the agent, *too much*, must be given up or altered[1].

Overdemandingness objections are hotly debated. Some label them a „typical modern perversion of truth"[2], while others argue that overdemanding theories „strike just about everyone as absurd"[3]. Given the importance of overdemandingness, we might expect a sig-

nificant amount of literature on its most fundamental concept, namely *demandingness*. But there is none, at least not in the form of an elaborate monographic study. But defenders of overdemandingness objections, e.g. Scheffler, as well as their opponents, e.g. Kagan, need a concept of demandingness, as it is precisely demandingness that might constitute a problem if it is excessive. A discussion of whether theories are *overly* demanding requires, in the first place, a clarification of the underlying subject, namely demandingness. But we lack investigations into the nature of demandingness. We do not know what kind of problem it is for our practical rationality and which role it should play in ethical theories. This tries to these gaps. Demandingness is a fundamental concept that poses philosophical questions (independent of any stance on overdemandingness), such as:

» (i) What is demandingness? Can conflicts of moral demands and well-being be reduced to the agent's costs (i.e. to sacrifices)? What is the role of difficulties for and the restriction of options of the agent?
» (ii) Is moral demandingness necessary, impossible or contingent? (If not impossible: What are the sources of demandingness and of its intensity? Is demandingness relative and, if so, to what?)

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1 This belief about the origins of the overdemandingness debate is widely shared (see Murphy, L.: Moral Demands in Nonideal Theory, Oxford: OUP 2000, fn. 3 and 5) but, as a historical account, it is short-sighted. For Kant raises such an objection against stoic ethics (V:127.2-3) and discusses it in general (V:126.14-127.16; V:60.26-36, 85.34-86.21, 111.18-113.12). Hegel criticises Kant in a similar way (Elements of the Philosophy of Right §133, 135; Phenomenology V.C.c., VI.C). Early demandingness objections against consequentialism have been debated by its proponents (see Godwin, W.: Thoughts Occasioned (1801), in: Philp, M. (ed.): Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin, 7 volumes, London 1993).
2 Raz, J.: A Morality Fit for Humans, in: Michigan Law Review 91 (6) 1993, 1297-1314, 1297. Note that Raz does not endorse this view.
3 Murphy, L.: Moral Demands in Nonideal Theory, Oxford: OUP 2000, 6.

Kurzvita

Marcel van Ackeren studierte Sozialwissenschaft und Philosophie in Duisburg und Glasgow. Die Promotion erfolgte 2001 in Philosophie in Bochum und die Habilitation 2010 in Köln. Er absolvierte zahlreiche Forschungsaufenthalte, z.B. in Oxford (1996-98), Cambridge (2003, 2007), Bern (2004) und Münster (2014) und hatte diverse Vertretungsprofessuren inne. Die Forschungsschwerpunkte liegen in der Antiken Philosophie, der Meta-Ethik und der Metaphilosophie bzw. der Bedeutung der historischen Perspektive für die Philosophie.

Fellow-Projekt

» Moral (Over-)Demandingness

Given the state of the world, persons are morally obliged to do a lot, e.g. to help victims of natural catastrophes, wars or car crashes, or to aid neighbours, friends and family. But besides facing the demands of morality, each person wants her own personal life to go well, and this pursuit of self-interest and personal projects might conflict with the demands of morality. The project will be an in-depth analysis of the nature and significance of conflicts between morality and well-being. It will show that the existence and intensity of these conflicts matter greatly, and that they should have an impact on our thinking and theorising about ethics and and influence our acting.

» (iii) Which aspects of an ethical theory contribute to its overall demandingness?
» (iv) Is demandingness a factor (or side constraint) that should be considered on the first-order level when arguing about the question *what* to demand?
» (v) What is rational for an agent to do? Is demandingness a conflict of reasons? Do the poles of the conflict consist of context-independent sets of considerations or reasons? Does demandingness presuppose a dualism of practical reasons?
» (vi) Do different types of normative theories (e.g. virtue ethics, deontology, consequentialism) have different sources, qualities or quantities of demandingness?
» (vii) What do answers to (i)-(vi) tell us about overdemandingess objections? Is there a threshold between demandingness and overdemandingness and, if so, where does it lie?

A clear and new notion of demandingness is not only necessary for laying the foundation for the debate on overdemandingness. Recent studies on supererogation point out that most accounts of supererogation since Urmson argue that actions which are overly demanding are taken to be supererogatory instead of obligatory[4]. Previous literature has focused on overdemandingness and consequentialism, but not on the fundamental concept of demandingness and its importance for all normative theories[5].

Today, there is not more than a handful of papers on the potential overdemandingness of moral theories other than consequentialism[6].

This project builds on misunderstood aspects of Raz' theory[7] and develop a new theory of demandingness by making use of Raz' conceptions of practical reasons[8]. - The projects main objectives in the form of questions and claims are:

» (O 1) *What is demandingness?* The aim is to provide an elaborate and fine-grained account of demandingness, its nature, sources and its relativity. Against the standard account, which reduces demandingness to costs, it is argued that demandingness has three sources: costs, difficulties and restriction of options. Furthermore, it will be shown that demandingness is agent- and context-relative. Demandingness can also come in the form of a peak or a constant intrusion.

» (O 2) *Lessons from History,* namely ancient virtue ethics and Kant, show that demandingness played an important role in moral theories *before* consequentialism and that it did and does so with regard to *other* types of normative theories. The two historical case studies fill a gap in the previous literature as it will be argued that virtue ethics and Kantian theory can be no less demanding than the often attacked impartial act-consequentialism, although for very different reasons.

» (O 3) *Demandingness and moral theories.* There needs to be a discussion of the relation between demandingness and moral theories. This discussion proceeds in two ways, as it distinguishes (a) aspects of a theory that contribute to its overall demandingness and (b) different approaches of theories towards the problem of demandingness. The main argument here concerns the fundamental question whether demandingness should be taken as a factor on the first-order level when it comes to establishing the answer to the question asking what to demand. It will be argued that demandingness is such a factor on the first-order level, because demandingness is part of what constitutes the moral perspective. In other words: When thinking about what to demand, we should also think about how demanding it would be for the addressee of the demand *in a given situation.*

» (O 4) *Demandingness as a Conflict of Reasons.* The project develops a new account of demandingness as a conflict of reason, making use of a theory of practical reason by J. Raz. It argues that arguments in favour of moral rationalism but also criticism against it (e.g. overridingness or silencing) are implausible if they *presuppose* a context-independent distinction between different and incommensurable kinds of reasons. Demandingness is not the expression of a dualism of reasons, nor should the conflict of reasons be taken to be a conflict of context-independent distinguishable classes of reasons. The new account is *deflationary* because it takes demandingness to be a conflict of reasons like any other practical conflict.

» (O 5) *The Lines between Demandingness and Overdemandingness.* This final step distinguishes various types of overdemandingness objections (e.g. alienation and integrity objections) and discusses attempts to determine the threshold between demandingness and overdemandingness. The new and finer-grained concept of demandingness allow us to see that attempts to define the threshold to *overdemandingness* either lack precision, and therefore are not applicable, or give an answer that does not hold true for all cases. But these problems should not lead us to dismiss the problem of demandingness and argue that overdemandingness does not exist.

4   Dorsey, D. (2013) The Supererogatory, and How to Accommodate It, in: Utilitas 25, 355-382; Benn, C. (2014): Over-demandingness objections and Supererogation, in: van Ackeren / Kühler (eds.) (2014): The Limits of Moral Obligations. Routledge: New York / London, pp. 68-83, Archer, A. (2015): Saints, Heroes and Moral Necessity, in: Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement 77:105-124.

5   Anti-theorists might argue that all theories as such are overdemanding as they neglect or diminish the importance of personal ground projects, goals, values or the weight of personal non-moral reasons (see Hooker, B. (2012): Theory vs. Anti-Theory in Ethics, in: Heuer, G./Lang, U. (ed.): Luck, Value and Commitment: Themes from the Ethics of Bernard Williams, Oxford: OUP, 19-40).

6   On contractualism, see Hills, A. (2010): Utilitarianism, Contractualism and Demandingness, in: Philosophical Quarterly 60, 225-242 and Ashford, E.: The Demandingness of Scanlon's Contractualism, in: Ethics 113, 273-302 (2003), (2000 or 2003). On virtue ethics, there is only Swanton, Ch. (2009): Virtue Ethics and the Problem of Demandingness, in: Chappell, T. (ed.) (2009): The Problem of Moral Demandingness, London: Acumen, 104-122), referring mainly to Hume and Nietzsche. A discussion of the demandingness of Kantian moral philosophy is called for by Mulgan, T. (2001): The Demands of Consequentialism, Oxford: OUP, 5-6), but provided only by van Ackeren, M. / Sticker, M. (2015): Kant and the Problem of Demandingness (2015), in: Ethical Theory Moral Practice 18, 75-89, and Pinheiro, Walla (2015): Kant's Moral Theory and Demandingness, in: Ethical Theory and Moral Practice; Timmermann, J. (2005): Good but Not Required? – Assessing the Demands of Kantian Ethics, in: Journal of Moral Philosophy 2, 9-27.

The most important contribution to the debate is Scheffler's Human Morality (OUP 1992), but it does not provide an elaborate account of the sources of demandingness and especially not of the conflict as a conflict of reasons, nor does his book contain any discussion of virtue ethics (in its current or ancient form) or of the demandingness of the Kantian system of duties. Also, Scheffler rejects moral rationalisms, but does not want to give an explicit argument against it. See Scheffler, S. (1992): Human Morality, Oxford: OUP 97. Scheffler's account was partly embraced but also heavily criticised by Raz, J. (1993): A Morality Fit for Humans, in: Michigan Law Review 91, 1297-1314.

7   Crisp and Wallace argue that Raz denies that morality and well-being can conflict or that his account makes it impossible to identify the poles of the conflict (Crisp, R. (1996).: Raz on Well-Being, in: Oxford Legal Studies 17, 499-515, and Wallace, R. J. (2004): The Rightness of Acts and Goodness of Lives, in: Wallace, J.R./ Pettit, Ph./Scheffler, S. (ed.): Reason and Value: Themes from the Moral Philosophy of John Raz, Oxford: Clarendon, 385-411). For criticism of Crisp and Wallace see Ackeren, M.v.: Putting the Central Conflict to Rest? Raz on morality and well-being, in: Ackeren, M., v. / Kühler, M. 2015, (eds.): The Limits of Moral Obligations. Moral Demandingness and Ought Implies Can, New York / London: Routledge 2015, 51-68.

8   Raz, J. (2009): Engaging Reason. Oxford: OUP. Also, there are two anthologies on the conflict: Bloomfield P. (ed.): Morality and Self-Interest (OUP, 2008), and a preparatory work by van Ackeren / Kühler (eds.): The Limits of Moral Obligations. Demandingness and Ought Implies Can (Routledge, 2016).

Ausgewählte Veröffentlichungen

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