

# A Theological Consideration of the Fundamental Option and Moral Epistemology Could We Regard Ourselves as Good People if Moral Knowledge is Impossible?

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*The paper analyses the justification of personal integrity in ethical theories in contemporary moral epistemology. In the first chapter we present a theological consideration of the fundamental option that illustrates the complexity of agency of moral knowledge in the epistemic evaluation of a moral act as a specifically human conduct. Then, in the second chapter we briefly describe the inference and the structure of moral knowledge in ethical theories. In the last chapter, we argue why our personal integrity, our own understanding of it in self-estimation is related to the possibility of moral knowledge. We claim that moral knowledge is crucial in development of moral integrity of a person. The speculations on the possibility of their inference and cognitive capacity reflect on the epistemic disposition of the human being as a moral agent. Although ethical theories have offered a scientifically and methodologically precise frame to justify the truthfulness of moral knowledge and judgments, they have not anticipated the important fact of integrity between the intention, free will and practical reason.*

**Key words:** *Ethical pluralism, fundamental option, moral knowledge, perfect good, personal integrity.*

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## *Introduction*

The term fundamental option or »fundamental freedom« was introduced in moral theology in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this paper we shall not focus on controversies that the hypothesis of the fundamental option has caused among moral theologians, although we shall not completely avoid them, our task shall primarily be to prove that moral knowledge presented in ethical theories is incompatible with the concept of a moral act as human.

### *1. The issue of fundamental option considered in moral theology*

In first chapter we shall firstly consider a theological critique of the concept of fundamental option in order to define consistent and integral agency of moral knowledge in an epistemic valuation of a moral act. Secondly, we shall study the causal relation in the fundamental option of »two levels« of decision-making. Thirdly, we shall attempt to answer why the concept of the perfect good is important for an integrative relation between moral knowledge and a moral act.

#### *1.1 Moral knowledge is consistent and integral*

The chapter dedicated to the fundamental option in the document *Veritatis splendor*, in English translation<sup>1</sup>, makes no mention of the term »moral knowledge« although there are places where the term »knowledge« appears in the context of the biblical meaning of knowledge and rational ability to apprehend the obligation to natural and divine law. The only place where the term »knowledge« is mentioned as a practical virtue is in the reference on the teachings of the Council of Trent about the graveness of mortal sin, which states that moral sin must be committed with *full knowledge* and deliberate consent.<sup>2</sup> This chapter addresses *full knowledge* as a deliberate involvement of a person in a moral act. Reason has the ability of moral judgment knowing the application of natural law to world of persons.<sup>3</sup> Personal act must be valued with consideration of gradient knowledge and consent, because, when we speak of moral facts and moral goodness, we do not intentionally focus on the objects in the world as perceptual, but toward the relations among persons and us, that is, a moral quality of our relationships. *Veritatis splendor* defines full and deliber-

<sup>1</sup> See JOHN PAUL II, *Veritatis splendor. Encyclical letter*, Dicastero per la Comunicazione – Libreria Editrice Vaticana (06.08.1993), [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_06081993\\_veritatis-splendor.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html) (30.10.2021).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. VS 71.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. VS 43.

ate moral knowledge as a necessary equipment in performing a moral act as personal and human. The option for good, if it is fundamental, must be then consistent, including the integrity of the person involved.

### 1.2 Two levels of decision-making

Moral theologians interpret the issue of the fundamental option (FO) presented in *Veritatis splendor* as an issue pertaining the relationship between the two levels of decision-making. Croatian moral theologian Marijan Valković insists that

»The freedom and power over a decision-making are essential part of the human being. But in all individual moral decisions in which he decides this or that, a much deeper decision is taking place: a man decides about himself considering the ultimate meaning of his own existence«.<sup>4</sup>

The hypothesis of the FO presupposes two forms of decision-making, the first, in individual cases, spatially, temporally and socially various; and the second, which is deeper, and which Valković describes as a decision with respect to the »ultimate meaning of existence«. The former is firmly connected with the latter, and we can state that the second form of decision is deeply rooted in the notion of self-identity. This relation is described by Pozaić

»*Optio fundamentalis* and individual acts (or doings) are in a constant mutual interaction and permeation. If the individual acts are in contrast with fundamental option, they are questioning him or transforming him, depending of their nature«.<sup>5</sup>

Although these interpretations are illustrative and helpful, we encounter a problem of defining the epistemic nature of this relation. How to justify one decision in relation to the other, one we believe is more crucial than the first one? As we see, according to Valković and Pozaić, it is possible that individual decisions can reconfigure the FO. The notion of *ultimate meaning* that Valković attributed to the FO, does not mean that it should function as a »cause« in the classical metaphysical context. If we justify all our acts, and even those that we have good intentions although individual acts do not confirm that, we rely only on our intention, although we are not those that give our actions the ultimate meaning, but vice versa: the actions we perform in the world of human affairs define our goals as meaningful, and in the end, ourselves. However, can we conceive our deeds as meaningful if we do not acknowledge the existence of the perfect Good?

<sup>4</sup> Marijan VALKOVIĆ, Grijeh danas. Iskustvo, teološko vrednovanje i pastoralne posljedice [Sin Today. Experience, Theological Valuation and Pastoral Consequences], *Bogoslovska smotra*, 46 (1976) 1-2, 5-22, 15.

<sup>5</sup> Valentin POZAIĆ, Pogled na encikliku »Veritatis splendor« [An Aspect on The Encyclical »Veritatis splendor«], *Obnovljeni život*, 49 (1994) 1, 3-8, 6.

### 1.3 *The perfect good transcends moral knowledge*

*Veritatis splendor* interprets Saint Thomas Aquinas' saying that the perfect good is the ultimate goal of moral conduct driven by good will and in accordance with the order of reason.<sup>6</sup> Is it necessary to believe in the perfect good to consider ourselves as good in the sense of the fundamental option according to Aquinas? Firstly, we must consider the fact that all that we do, we do have some knowledge of purpose. And even if those actions can be regarded as indifferent, nevertheless, we have certain awareness that we change something, even if we just make several steps from the kitchen, to the living room. Secondly, the knowledge of the final goal is intrinsic to our mind, consequently it is necessary to believe in the final outcome of moral deeds. As Copleston suggests in his comment on the perfect good in St. Thomas, the knowledge of the final goal of our moral deeds is intrinsically present in our minds, in the same manner as the knowledge of a sculpture is present in mind of a sculptor.<sup>7</sup> Given that the artist needs paints and brushes, instruments external to his imagination, thus the knowledge of the perfect good is incomplete without the knowledge of moral reality, acts and behaviour of others.

We do not have the full knowledge about the future of someone's moral conduct, nor do we have an answer to the question will they gain moral perfectness sometime in the future. Therefore, the purpose of moral doing, the »perfect good« transcends the capacity of the person involved, and presupposes the exertion of personal conscience as consciousness about self-identity in relation to good or evil deeds.<sup>8</sup> Because the individual and various acts form the fundamental option for good or evil, and those acts belong to moral reality, we assume that acknowledgement of the existence of the perfect good as the ultimate goal of moral conduct has a relevant role in self-valuation. Self-valuation in this context can be interpreted as religious knowledge, but we claim that is also relevant for moral epistemology, particularly if we consider practical implications of ethical theories.

## 2. *Ethical pluralism and possibility of moral knowledge*

Before we present our claims that the possibility of moral knowledge is relevant for our personal reflection on ourselves, in this chapter we shall consider the problem of ethical pluralism – different ethical theories which suggest

<sup>6</sup> Cf. VS 78.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Frederick C. COPLESTON, *El pensamiento de Santo Tomás* [The Thought of Saint Thomas], México, Fondo de cultura Económica, 1960, 233.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Ivan FUČEK, *Moralno-duhovni život. Osoba; Savjest*, sv. I. [Moral and Spiritual Life. Person; Conscience, vol. I], Split, Verbum, 2003, 44.

various explications on the issue of sources and inference of moral knowledge. Their basic distinction is founded in a definition that every form of knowledge, including moral, must be truthful, justified and believed. Some of them affirm the possibility of its inference, some of them reject the inference and other epistemic conditions, and some of them even claim that the classical concept of moral knowledge lacks fundamental epistemic conditions to be considered as knowledge.

### *2.1 Our moral knowledge is possible, non-inferential or inferential*

Ethical theories such as utilitarian empiricism, Kant's rationalism and intuitionism define moral beliefs as directly derived from the reason, emotion and intuition. In other words, we can act morally believing that we are doing so in accordance with the categorical imperative, or for the purpose of avoiding discomfort that is, pain, or on the basis of intuition, that we must obey *prima facie* obligations. All these theories are also defined as foundational because foundational beliefs do not need inferential justification.<sup>9</sup> We may also consider contextualism and reliabilism foundational, as they presuppose the justification of moral judgments on non-derived beliefs. With reference to the former, we find our beliefs already justified the circumstances in which wish to perform a moral act, and with respect to the latter, we rely on moral sensitivity that is able, from a combination of morally relevant situations and drawing moral conclusions from the situation, to produce true moral beliefs in us.<sup>10</sup> Contrary to these theories we have coherentist theory. According to them, our moral judgements are inferred from sets of beliefs which must have a minimal degree of logical consistency.

### *2.2 Our moral knowledge is not achievable, non-cognitivism, scepticism*

Non-cognitivists claim that we express our attitudes, not rationally justified statements.<sup>11</sup> Our statements are based on the emotional states of mind, thus they can be irrational, based on prejudices, anger or ignorance. In non-cognitivism, there are no moral propositions to be known, or otherwise »cognized«. <sup>12</sup> Can we equate non-cognitivism with moral scepticism? »Local« because it refers to a special field of moral judgment, different from all other

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Peter TRAMEL, *Moral Epistemology*, in: Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <https://iep.utm.edu/> (19.12.2021).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Tramel, *Moral Epistemology*..

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Robert AUDI, *Epistemology. A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, New York, Routledge, 1998, 260.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Audi, *Epistemology*..., 261.

fields of knowledge (perceptual, religious, social, scientific),<sup>13</sup> although it cannot be denied that moral knowledge is related to these fields with exception of the perceptual, because it seems difficult to contradict moral judgement on the basis of perceptual experience.

### *2.3 Epistemology naturalized: moral knowledge is possible only if it is scientifically provable*

Non-cognitive theory has developed from a scientific attempt to explain moral knowledge, present in the scientific thought of Dewey and Quine. For Dewey, moral knowledge, which he identifies with conscience and reason, is not creditable in establishing moral as system of values, but for its development we must be

»fostering those impulses and habits which experience has shown to make us sensitive, generous, imaginative, impartial in perceiving the tendency of our inchoate dawning activities«. <sup>14</sup>

We suppose that Dewey believes that individual moral knowledge is not relevant if it depends on metaphysical concepts but derives from scientific understanding of our volition and emotions. When we understand ourselves as beings with emotions that need restrictions, we shall be able to construct a valid system of values. Much like Dewey, Quine urges epistemologists to renounce the project of explaining knowledge a priori, from first principles, thus independently of science.<sup>15</sup> Moral attitudes on child labour were rejected in the past on the grounds of scientific and medical insights and research. That physical work in mines and factories was harmful for children was proven by medicine, and that impacted the public opinion in general, and consequently influenced moral judgements pertaining to that issue. Child labour remained a practice even after the Industrial Revolution albeit in a different scope. Nevertheless, if we claim that moral knowledge is in fact grounded in ignorance of the basic human rights, then we justify scientific knowledge as corrective for all moral statements.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Zvonimir ČULJAK, *Znanje i epistemičko opravdanje. Uvod u epistemologiju* [Knowledge and Epistemic Justification. Introduction to Epistemology], Zagreb, Ibis, 2015, 306.

<sup>14</sup> John DEWEY, *A Common Faith*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1934, 207.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Richmond CAMPBELL, *Moral Epistemology*, in: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (06.11.2019), <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-epistemology/> (02.11.2021).

### 3. *Can we justify our personal acts as morally correct if moral knowledge is relative?*

On the one hand, we claim, with respect to the theological critique of the fundamental option, that moral acts should be regarded as a manifestation of human deliberate awareness and free will, and on the other, we have various definitions about the inferential structure of moral knowledge, and the possibility of obtaining it in the end. In addition, we claim that the concept of the perfect good is essential for moral knowledge. A person and an act are firmly bounded, and moral identity of a person is inseparable from moral quality of a preformed act in the world of human relations. Do ethical theories suggest the opposite when they question the possibility of moral knowledge?

#### 3.1 *The problem with foundational theories and coherentism*

In Kantian rationalistic theory, moral knowledge can be accessed with rational understanding. This means that we can come to conclusions or moral judgments about certain situations which then demand our personal engagement. For Kant, these principles are a priori in nature, and applying them we consider others as ends not as means of our conduct.<sup>16</sup> In line with this theory, moral truth is understandable as it is, similarly to certain mathematical truths and axioms. The problem that emerges considering our own estimation about ourselves as moral agents is related to the practical availability of the categorical imperative, although at the same time I have to accept the possibility that I have immortal soul, and consequently, the existence of God.<sup>17</sup> If I accept this position in which I become a legislator and at the same time the one that has an obligation, then I fall into the trap of contradiction, as Sertillanges described in this question: is a man a God that commands and a creature that obeys?<sup>18</sup> Accepting such contradiction, we can assume that that a person can believe that he is righteous because he obeys the categorical imperative, but he can remain agnostic with respect the goal of moral conduct. In other words, we can have an *idea* of moral perfectness of ourselves, that could never be completed in reality. It serves only as an idea one can believe in, even if one does not acknowledge the real existence of the perfect good.

The compliance of a person and a moral act in order to achieve moral perfection in utilitarian empiricism is related to achieving general social standard that provides happiness for each member of a community. To ensure this sort

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Audi, *Epistemology...*, 334.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Peter FISCHER, *Filozofija religije* [Philosophy of Religion], Zagreb, Breza, 2010, 88.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Antoine D. SERTILLANGES, *El Cristianismo Y Las Filosofías*, Madrid, Editorial Gredos, 1939, 56.

of equilibrium among individuals, the task of moral knowledge lies in the capacity to distinguish personal affiliations and pleasures in agreement with the affiliations and pleasures of the others. The issue with this concept, apart from the question of personal involvement, is that a unique form of happy, fulfilled life does not exist, except as a general notion. And if this concept of universal form of happiness is based on an empirical attempt to observe the intensity or form of human pleasures, two or several of them, we find that his justification is impossible,

»the pleasures are always mixed with something from ourselves, which prevents us from speaking, with any philosophically good result, of this sort of independent comparability among them«.<sup>19</sup>

Seeing that the state of personal happiness of an individual cannot be empirically proven by comparing it with the state of personal happiness of others, we are therefore left with an abstract concept of happiness adequate for a possibility of a perfect society. If happiness of all exists, then perfect society also exists, but every assumption of a perfect society includes the progression of human morality reflected in morality of individuals. The issue with progression of human morality in the form of mutual consensus among individuals about what is wrong and what is right appears in the application of intuitionism.

Intuition affirms the possibility of absolute certainty when we judge our own moral action. However, as Henry Sidgwick has observed, we cannot judge an action to be right for A and wrong for B, unless we can find in nature of circumstances of the two some difference which we can regard as a reasonable ground for difference in their duty.<sup>20</sup> Considering we discuss the moral quality of actions done by two different persons, we imply the circumstances are different, even if these persons have done something similar in terms of the cognitive nature of actions. We may assume that they both acted rightly, according to the categorical imperative, although one of them acted more conscientious than the other. To apply intuitive moral knowledge implies then a hypothetical arrangement of ideal circumstances, but then there would not exist different categories of subjective and objective rightness.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, we encounter a difficulty in the application of intuitive knowledge of moral facts in everyday decision-making. To decide intuitively between right and wrong every time when we are in a moral dilemma implies that the circumstances shall always remain same and fixed not only for me, but for all others involved. With respect to reliabilism, the same ideal condition is necessary, if we are to stay aware of the effects of a moral act.

<sup>19</sup> John GROTE, Joseph BICKERSTETH MAYOR, *An Examination of the Utilitarian Philosophy*, London, Bell and Daldy, 1870, 54.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Henry SIDGWICK, *The Methods of Ethics*, London, MacMillan and Co., 1874, 208.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Sidgwick, *The Methods...*, 208.

The foundational and coherent aspect of moral knowledge and volitional engagement are deeply contrasted, as coherentism implies a logically connected set of beliefs, to be crucial in making of moral judgments. A possible solution that could reconcile the foundational demand for justification from inferential beliefs and coherent with non-inferential beliefs, can be suggested by contextual theory.<sup>22</sup> Every situation in which one needs to choose between right and wrong, to make certain decision that reflects one's integrity can be described as *context*, a kind of a fabric of connections between intuitive beliefs and coherent sets of beliefs that have been previously derived. If we need to justify our beliefs according the proper arrangement of circumstances, then our beliefs are not contextually connected.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, moral judgment can be verified from two opposite corners: in first, A, we assume that a moral agent (S) is not in condition to know *h*, and in the second, B, we assume that *h* is not the truth.<sup>24</sup> From a logical perspective, certain proposition cannot be truthful and false at same time, and with reference to the cognitive approach, a moral fact cannot be simultaneously truthful and false, although it does not affect the belief of a moral agent.

He can believe that what he says about a moral fact is true although, concretely it is not. Even Annis presumes that the objectors could not be acquainted with fallacy of belief *h* and it can be a sufficient reason for a moral agent to justify his belief although it is not true.<sup>25</sup> As much as the claim for verification in contextualism seems legitimate in order to verify one's knowledge on a certain moral fact, it depends not only on statements of those whose moral knowledge we wish to verify, but also on the number and status of those who object. We can hardly predict the scope of the context that includes intuitive beliefs and coherent sets on which someone builds his own moral statements, since a variety of circumstances and situations exists.

### 3.2 Moral non-cognitivism: Attitude and knowledge

Non-cognitivists assume that no moral knowledge about the truthfulness or the falsehood about a certain moral fact can be inferred. In other words, beliefs that define a moral fact truthful or not, cannot be justified, because we speak about a personal attitude towards some moral fact, not about knowledge. Consequently, moral actions, done in reality of the human relationships, can be taken as indifferent to a cognitive capacity of a person that believes in moral

<sup>22</sup> Cf. David ANNIS, *Kontekstualistička teorija epistemičkog opravdanja* [Contextual Theory of Epistemic Justification] in: Zvonimir ČULJAK, *Vjerovanje, opravdanje i znanje. Suvremene teorije znanja i opravdanja* [Believing, Justification and Knowledge. A Contemporary Theories of Knowledge and Justification], Zagreb, Ibis, 2003, 266-275.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Trimel, *Moral Epistemology...*

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Annis, *Kontekstualna teorija...*, 267.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Annis, *Kontekstualna teorija...*, 267.

norms or in intrinsic authority of conscience. If my beliefs are nothing but attitudes based on emotions that justify moral facts as truthful or not, then why do I need them? I only require the knowledge about the truthfulness of moral facts. Yet this assumption needs to be considered firstly under in light of the existence of a moral reality, and secondly, in terms of the relation between practical reason and emotions. When we speak about moral facts as actions or behaviours performed by me or others, then we cannot be absolutely indifferent about them. To say that we are faced with facts, could mean that we can analyse this phenomenon and remain indifferent toward it. We can say that it is raining outside and claim that this phenomenon is only a *fact*, but in doing this we did not say anything crucial about it except that is a fact. However, if we claim that it will rain until the evening (because we saw the weather forecast) and we say that we need an umbrella, then it cannot be understood as a *mere fact*, given that I might get wet and catch a cold.

Campbell suggests that facts as components of moral reality can be interpreted as theological, natural or non-natural.<sup>26</sup> To interpret moral facts as non-natural implies, as we have seen in intuitionism, that there is an axiomatic a priori system according to which facts are interpreted as true. If they are natural as other phenomena in reality defined as natural, then their truthfulness varies depending on the verified predictions of future outcomes. In both cases, moral truth seems to be determined, not chosen to be believed in by personal free will that reflects on a moral agent and his own awareness about personal goodness. Cognition on truth and fallacy about personal morality cannot be divorced from moral knowledge because in moral situations we encounter immediately not only the possible outcome of the choice between right and wrong, but also indirectly how that outcome of choice defines our notion of personal goodness of evilness. The truth about circumstances of a personal act, is not the truth about a person. We illustrate this connection with an example of an ordinary working man who finds himself in contrary situations.

In the first case, a person gives a charitable donation to a poor man in the street so that he can buy lunch; in the second, the same person reveals corruption among the staff in company where he works. We suppose that he had made a decision to do good driven by a sense of empathy toward the man in need, and he accomplished this decision. Conversely, in the second example, and we are talking about same person, there is no lack of moral judgment about good, but he is lacking the virtue of courage, or the knowledge that he must act in courageous way if he believes that he is equally good in situations in which can help a begging man in this situation, when he must act against corruption. Did he act according to the value in which he believes, or according to the about situation? David Brink suggest that a major part of our desires (motives) to

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Campbell, *Moral epistemology...*

do what is good is based on *having the values*.<sup>27</sup> However, having values can also be a sensation that cannot bring us the truth about ourselves, and hence, we need to *use* values in a practical, concrete way in moral situations which implies the involvement of practical reason, and the task of practical reason is a clear distinction of truth and falsehood, that involves not only the frame of circumstance, but also a volition given in concept of value.

### 3.3 *Epistemology naturalized: freedom and probability*

As previously stated, with non-cognitivist view on moral behaviour, according to Ayer, is that we are in a position not to describe moral reality, but only prescribe it.<sup>28</sup> What does it mean, to say that a moral agent describes moral reality? Does this description fit scientific calculations? We must return to the notion of a moral fact. Alasdair MacIntyre suggest that this shift of metaphysical understanding of a moral act(or fact) comes from a transformed transition from Aristotelian to mechanist view: »fact« becomes »value free«, »is« becomes stranger to »ought«, and explication, as well as evaluation, changes its character as a result of this divorce between »is« and »ought«.<sup>29</sup> Naturalized epistemology strives to define moral facts according to socially, psychologically or biologically conditioned states of affairs in the outside world that independently exists outside our reach. We can involve ourselves in changing social injustice, climate imbalance or in helping others with mental disorders, perhaps depression, most common in the western society. We can have a strong sense of the common good, but we cannot change conditions pertaining to their initial cause. From the perspective of an individual, it seems that social relations are too complex, that the mental state of the other is too layered, and the natural world remains despite our scientific forecasting strategies still very unpredictable. In accordance with these conditions, we cannot regard the reality as good or evil because our judgment of it depends on knowing the future events: if future events are to my advantage because if I know the development of conditions, then my judgments of goodness of this reality is justified and if I am ignorant about them, then it is not.

Hypothetically, we can assume that, even if we are completely aware of the moral behaviour in the future, we are not obligated to act so if we possess free will. We can assume that it is perhaps possible to predict moral acts of someone

<sup>27</sup> »Noi tutti muoviamo da certi fini e desideri: siamo attratti da particolari passione, e abbiamo desideri per attività, e stati di cose più che per lui. Ora questi fini e desideri riflettono *giudizi valutativi*. Nelle case della maggior parte delle cose che desideriamo le desideramo perché pensiamo che abbiamo valore« (David O. BRINK, *Il realismo morale e i fondamenti dell'etica*, Milano, V&P Università, 2003, 53).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Tramel, *Moral epistemology...*

<sup>29</sup> Alasdair MacINTYRE, *After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Pres, 2007, 84.

else, it does not change the position of intention as the inner state of his deliberate consent. Ignorance about future events in reality leaves us with a conclusion that we cannot make moral judgements about it, except in the present instance. If we describe personal judgments as attitudes, introspection cannot infer conclusions beyond this moment, because it cannot determine a causal relation between »attitude events«. <sup>30</sup> Assuming that others have a higher goal of moral conduct to achieve, we can infer certain conclusions from choices, insisting on sociological and psychological background and aligning ours with theirs; but still, it is not sufficient to very future outcomes of personal behaviour or of the behaviour of others.

### *Conclusion*

In order to answer the question why and how moral knowledge is important for our self-valuation as morally good, we have considered the problem of the fundamental option in moral theology and ethical theories about the sources and structure of moral knowledge in the contemporary moral epistemology. We have established that theological valuation defines a moral act with respect to personal integrity of practical reason and free will. In contrast, ethical theories in moral epistemology of the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century have not examined the existence nor the purpose of moral knowledge but its possibility. We assume that ethical theories strive to explain moral knowledge emerging from the Cartesian problem of duality, and in the light of positivism and scientism. If moral knowledge implies the concept of unified agency of belief, justification and truthfulness toward the moral reality and moral facts, personal integrity is in many ways questionable. We have considered the problem of moral truth, and we assert that truth about a moral action is reflected on the truthfulness about a person as a moral agent. Non-cognitivism is unable to resolve the issue of personal integrity since the conception of personal integrity affirms the possible consistence and continuity of moral judgment. Considering »classical« theories on moral knowledge we claim that utilitarian, Kantian and intuitionist theories imply empirically justified sets of social conditions that can verify one's moral judgement, although it is difficult to prove.

We cannot value one's integrity in moral conduct if we rely exclusively on circumstances, they can guarantee a certain insight on external agents, although they cannot provide us with the total picture on the intentions and beliefs. We find a similar problem in theories of contextualism and reliabilism. A scientific approach to moral conduct in naturalized epistemology implies that moral behaviour of an individual could be highly predictable. Nevertheless,

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Peter CARRUTHERS, *The Opacity of Mind. An Integrative Theory of Self-Knowledge*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, 330.

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that assumption involves deterministic and mechanistic architecture of mind. We find that the concept of the fundamental option can be relevant for moral epistemology, as it implies personality that unifies knowledge, rationality and free will in a consistent and practical system, an idea that is fragmented in ethical pluralism. The controversy over the fundamental option has in a certain way predicted further accent on moral knowledge in ethical theories.

Bruno Matos\*

*Teološko promišljanje temeljnog opredjeljenja i moralna epistemologija.  
Možemo li smatrati sebe kao dobre ljude ako je moralna spoznaja nemoguća?*

Sažetak

Predmet rasprave u ovom članku je vezan za problem osobnog integriteta u etičkim teorijama u suvremenoj moralnoj epistemologiji. U prvom dijelu smo predstavili teološko razmatranje temeljnog opredjeljenja koje ilustrira složenost djelovanja moralne spoznaje za epistemičko vrednovanje moralnog čina kao specifičnog ljudskog čina. Stoga smo u drugom opisali u kratkim crtama izvođenje i strukturu moralne spoznaje u etičkim teorijama. U zadnjem dijelu, pokušali smo opravdati postavku o povezanosti opravdanja našeg osobnog integriteta, našeg razumijevanja vlastite pravednosti s etičkim spekulacijama o vjerojatnosti moralne spoznaje.

*Ključne riječi: etički pluralizam, moralna spoznaja, osobni integritet, savršeno dobro, temeljno opredjeljenje.*

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