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What's Right and Good about Internet Information? A Universal Model of Ethics for Evaluating the Cultural Quality of Digital Information

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Abstract

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The overall primary objective of this paper is to describe and propose a meta-ethical as well as normative model for the theoretical and practical evaluation of the quality of digital information on the Internet in terms of rights (the Right), virtues of character and moral sentiments (the Good) and eudaimonia, happiness or self-fulfillment (the Good Life). This model as I shall argue must of necessity be universal and objective in its mode of justification and motivation and global in its reach. It has to be able to transcend cultural borders¹ so as to be able to objectively evaluate the quality of information that is in its essence borderless and global.

Although the model proposed is universal and objective, it has both local and global applications. Furthermore, it allows and can account for the maximal flexibility and variety of expression of any number of personal and cultural perspectives and interests. Although universal, the model proposed is not dogmatic as it is based, of necessity, on universal shared interests and capacities, in short, the general interest and capacity for purposive action that all human agents have in common, irrespective of their specific cultural placement and orientation. More importantly, the model proposed overcomes moral relativism. As the proposed model is based on the supreme principle of morality (Alan Gewirth's Principle of Generic Consistency, the PGC) the model can accommodate other ethical theories and is thus sensitive at least to some minimal robust pluralism based on the requirements of practical reason.

Keywords: Ethics, rights, the good, virtues, moral sentiments, freedom and wellbeing, the good life, self-fulfillment, eudaimonia, happiness, information, knowledge, the Principle of Generic Consistency (PGC).

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Primary Objective

The overall primary objective of this paper is to describe and propose a meta-ethical as well as normative model for the theoretical and practical evaluation of the quality of digital information on the Internet. This model as I shall argue must of necessity be universal and objective in its mode of justification and motivation and global in its reach. It has to be able to transcend cultural borders² so as to be able to objectively evaluate the quality of information that is in its essence borderless and global.

¹ Unless otherwise specified, I will use the term *cultural borders* to refer to all type of borders, including geographical, national, ethnic (ethnic borders within multi-ethnic nations such as the USA, Canada and Australia, for example), religious, gender, political, and lifestyle borders.

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The paper will discuss some general value-related aspects of digital information in terms of a unified notion of the *The Right and the Good*³ (Spence 2006), but due to constraints of space the paper will mainly be concerned with the epistemological and ethical quality of digital information.

Due to constraints of space, I will also not attempt to provide a justification for Alan Gewirth's argument for the Principle of Generic Consistency (PGC) on which his derivation of rights is based, as this is well beyond the scope and limits of this paper. I offer such a detailed defense in my *Ethics Within Reason: A Neo-Gewirthian Approach* (2006). I will, however, offer a brief summary of the rationale of the argument for the PGC, a schematic outline of the three major steps of that argument, as well as a summary of my reconstruction of the argument around the concept of dignity, which is designed to show that although agents have only prima facie rights to freedom and wellbeing they hold those rights absolutely with respect to their personal dignity, which is also partly constituted by their membership of a particular cultural community. A person's dignity is therefore constituted by a personal as well as a communal orientation.

1.2 The Rights of Agents: The Rationale for Alan Gewirth's Argument for the Principle of Generic Consistency⁴

Gewirth's main thesis is that every rational agent, in virtue of engaging in action, is logically committed to accept a supreme moral principle, the Principle of Generic Consistency. The basis of his thesis is found in his doctrine that action has a normative structure, and because of this structure every rational agent, just in virtue of being an agent, is committed to certain necessary prudential and moral constraints.

Gewirth undertakes to prove his claim that every agent, *qua* agent, is committed to certain prudential and moral constraints in virtue of the normative structure of

³ See Spence, E.H. (2006, Chapter 5). In that chapter, Spence proposes and defends a unified model of the *Right and the Good*, which accounts for the Good in terms of a unified and universal account of rights, virtues and the moral sentiments – a fusion of the “warm Humean and the austere Kantian”.

⁴ A full and detailed defense of the argument for the PGC against all the major objections raised against it by various philosophers can be found in Spence 2006 (Chapters 1 to 3), Beyleveld 1991 and Gewirth 1978.

action in three main stages. First, he undertakes to show that by virtue of engaging in voluntary and purposive action, every agent makes certain implicitly evaluative judgments about the goodness of his purposes, and hence about the necessary goodness of his freedom and wellbeing, which are the necessary conditions for the fulfillment of his purposes. Secondly, he undertakes to show that by virtue of the necessary goodness which an agent attaches to his freedom and wellbeing, the agent implicitly claims that he has rights to these.

Thirdly, Gewirth undertakes to show that every agent must claim these rights in virtue of the sufficient reason that he is a *prospective purposive agent* (PPA) who has purposes he wants to fulfill. Furthermore, every agent must accept that, since he has rights to his freedom and wellbeing for the sufficient reason that he is a PPA, he is logically committed, on pain of self-contradiction, to also accept the rational generalization that all PPAs have rights to freedom and wellbeing (Gewirth 1978, 48- 128). The conclusion of Gewirth's argument for the PGC is in fact a generalized statement for the PGC, namely, that all PPAs have rights to their freedom and wellbeing.

1.3 A Summarized Outline of Gewirth's Argument for the PGC

The following is a summarized outline of Gewirth's argument for the PGC. Every PPA has to rationally accept from within his own internal standpoint the following statements and their consequent logical entailments:

Stage I

1. I do X for purpose E.

(1) entails:

2. E is good
3. My freedom and wellbeing are generically necessary conditions of my agency.

(2) and (3) entail:

4. My freedom and wellbeing are necessary goods.

Stage II

(4) entails:

5. All other persons ought, at least, to refrain from interfering with my having freedom and wellbeing

and (5) entails:

6. I have rights to freedom and wellbeing.

Stage III

Applying the argument from the sufficiency of agency to (6) entails:

7. I have rights to freedom and wellbeing because I am a PPA

and applying the principle of universalizability to (7) entails:

8. All PPAs have rights to freedom and wellbeing.

(8) entails:

9. I ought at least to refrain from interfering with the freedom and wellbeing of any and every PPA

from which it follows that every agent is rationally committed to accepting the general moral principle, the Principle of Generic Consistency (PGC):

10. Act in accord with the generic rights of your recipients as well as of yourself.

1.4 The Absolute Right to Personal Dignity: A Reconstruction of Gewirth's Argument for the PGC

My reconstruction of Gewirth's argument for the PGC around the notion of dignity or self-respect (for the purpose of this paper I will use those terms interchangeably) in my book *Ethics Within Reason: A Neo- Gewirthian Approach* (Spence 2006, pp. 159-213) shows that an agent must not only claim rights to his freedom and wellbeing on the basis that these are the necessary conditions for all his purposive actions, but he must also claim rights to his freedom and wellbeing because these are the essential and fundamental constituents of his self-respect. In sum, an agent must consider that he has rights to his freedom and wellbeing not only because he is the sort of being who engages in voluntary and purposive action—that is to say, a being who is a *PPA*—but also because he is the sort of being who needs self-respect—that is to say, a being who is a *person*.

We can now see that to some degree at least, a person has the generic rights in virtue of being a person irrespective of what he does or omits to do as an agent. For every person, no matter what he does or fails to do, needs his self-respect. Because all persons need their self-respect equally in virtue of being persons, each person will need a certain degree of freedom and wellbeing, especially the latter, in order to preserve and maintain a minimal degree of self-respect so as to preserve and maintain his personhood. Thus, a criminal needs his self-respect as much as a law-abiding citizen. In this sense, they must both have sufficient freedom and wellbeing to allow them to preserve and maintain their self-respect. To the extent that a person has a right to have enough freedom and wellbeing in order to maintain his self-respect, that right is absolute. The right to minimal freedom and wellbeing, sufficient for a person to preserve and maintain his self-respect, cannot

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be removed without at the same time removing the very conditions necessary for an agent's personhood.

According to Gewirth:

a right is absolute when it cannot be overridden in any circumstances, so that it can never be justifiably infringed and it must be fulfilled without any exceptions. (Gewirth 1982, 219)

1.5 The Methodology of Argumentation

Methodologically, I will assume the justification of Gewirth's argument for the PGC and argue that insofar as Gewirth's argument for the PGC is justified, his derivation of both negative and positive rights based on that argument provide a *reasonable foundation for universal and global ethics*. Such a model of universal and global ethics is necessary if it is to apply to an evaluation of digital information on the Internet, which is global in its scope and use. More generally and by extension of argument, this ethical model can also be applied to computer ethics, generally⁵. This is so for at least five reasons:

- 1.1 The formal structure of the argument, which requires the rational recognition of rights of freedom and wellbeing for all human purposive agents on pain of self-contradiction (the formal condition of the argument for the PGC), renders those rights universal and therefore at least global in their scope. I say at least global, because as universal rights, the rights prescribed by the PGC could extend to purposive agents of rational species other than human and potentially, if such exist, to extra-terrestrial purposive agents. Insofar as artificial purposive agents, such as androids, are possible, the rights to freedom and wellbeing that the PGC prescribes could also extend to them.
- 1.2 The necessary content for the argument of the PGC provided by the necessary features of action, and specifically purposive action, namely, freedom and wellbeing (the necessary material condition for the argument for the PGC) renders those features and the generic rights to which they give rise, also universal and therefore at least global in scope.
- 1.3 As Gewirth correctly observes, the positivity of rights is important for establishing a connection between rights and community (Gewirth, 1996). This is so not only locally within the boundaries of specific cultural groups and nations, but also globally. For in the absence of positive rights it would be difficult to see how a global community based on universal rights, at least generic rights to freedom and wellbeing could be established. For after all, global ethics presupposes some kind of a global community, a cosmopolitan community if you like, to which global ethics refers and applies. Gewirth's argument for the PGC, which provides the foundation for not only negative but also positive rights to freedom and wellbeing, demonstrates how a global community based on universal rights, including one on the Internet, could, in

⁵ I agree, therefore, with Gorniak-Kocikowska's claim that because of its global nature "computer ethics has to be regarded as global ethics" (1996)

principle at least, be established. This might prove more difficult to achieve in practice of course, but establishing the necessary theoretical foundations for global ethics is an essential first step. The paper will show that Gewirth's theory for negative and positive rights provides a theoretical and foundational step in the right direction.

- 1.4 Related to the above consideration, Gewirth's argument from the PGC to both negative and positive generic rights to freedom and wellbeing is not only rationally justified but also practically motivating. This is so because the agent addressed in the argument for the PGC is not some disembodied and asocial abstract agent but any actual putative socially-placed and socially-engaged agent who motivationally values their freedom and wellbeing precisely because they recognize them as being the necessary enabling conditions for the fulfillment of their *own* specific individual and communal purposive actions (Spence, 2006).
- 1.5 Finally, because the argument for the PGC is able to generate generic universal rights to freedom and wellbeing that cannot be denied by any rational agent on pain of self-contradiction, moral relativism which is a serious threat to and a problem for the whole notion and project of global ethics, cannot take hold.

Still, however, some people might be concerned that universal rights even to freedom and wellbeing impose a kind of moral totalitarianism or uniformity that denies the undeniable phenomenon of the rich variety and differences in moral experiences in different parts of the world. This concern, however, although understandable, is unwarranted. For although the PGC prescribes a universality of rights to freedom and wellbeing, it does not and need not prescribe uniformity with regard to the individual or communal expression of those rights in different parts of the world.

So long as individuals or social groups from different parts of the world respect the rights to freedom and wellbeing of other people, they can elect and indeed they have the right to, apply their freedom and wellbeing to express themselves in any manner they so wish, both on-line and off-line. Living authentically one's life idiosyncratically, both individually and socially within one's particular social, ethnic, religious or gender group is not in any way incompatible with respecting the rights to freedom and wellbeing of others to do the same.

In conclusion of this section, the generic rights to freedom and wellbeing prescribed by the PGC, although universal impose no uniformity on living one's life as one chooses to, but on the contrary allow for maximal variety of moral experience and expression to both individuals and social groups worldwide, on the proviso of course that people respect each others' rights to freedom and wellbeing. For all the reasons referred to under (1.1) to (1.5) above, Gewirth's theory of rights provides a reasonable and, I believe, important and useful basis for a model of universal and global ethics, one that can be used to evaluate the cultural quality of digital information on the Internet that in both its scope and use has an essentially global character.

2. DESCRIBING THE THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL PROBLEM

Any theoretical model for the critical evaluation of the cultural quality of information generally and that of digital information on the Internet specifically (*interformation* henceforth) has to be able to address the problem that there are many cultural varieties and differences, not always compatible or consistent, that exist both intra-nationally and inter-nationally. Cultural relativism and more critically moral relativism threaten from every corner. How does one propose let alone provide a theoretical (and practical) model for the evaluation of interformation that can address the problem of cultural and moral relativism? Given the global reach and scope of the World Wide Web that now reaches and impacts on every part of the planet, any theoretical model that seeks to not merely describe the cultural quality of interformation but *evaluate* it, at least in its epistemological and ethical manifestations, must itself be global in its application and scope. For it to be global in its application, however, it has to be universal and objective in its mode of justification and motivation. It must be able to evaluate interformation on the basis of universal principles that most if not all reasonable individuals irrespective of their cultural differences and affiliations can accept and more importantly must accept on the basis of their shared minimal rationality, a minimal rationality which like language is a universal condition for discourse, necessary for all human communication. Communication cannot proceed let alone succeed if no one observed, for example, the minimal rational principle of non-contradiction (“A” and not “A” at the same time and in the same respect).

My main aim in this paper is to provide a solution to this problem by proposing a universal theoretical model which can provide at least in principle a method for evaluating objectively interformation in all its modes of production, communication and uses across the globe. As such, the model proposed is both objective and universal in its justification and as such global in its scope and application. Moreover, because of its necessary content provided by the essential features of all action and purposive action in particular, namely, freedom and wellbeing, the argument for the Principle of Generic Consistency (PGC) offers adequate motivation *capable* of motivating any putative minimally rational agent to comply with the PGC’s requirement for the and universal respect of all people’s rights to freedom and wellbeing.

Of course even the adequate justification and motivation provided by the argument for the PGC cannot guarantee compliance. No argument, no matter how compelling, can induce compliance in anyone who stubbornly refuses to comply with its prescriptions even when the non-compliant agent is convinced by their own minimal rationality that they have both good justificatory and motivational reasons of doing so. Insofar as a sociopath or psychopath or simply an amoral person are minimally rational, they may well recognize and acknowledge that there are convincing reasons to act ethically but still choose not to do so. A person who although recognizes and acknowledges the health hazards of smoking, for example, but still cannot bring themselves to kick the habit, is a prime non-moral example of how adequate justification and motivation (lets assume that the smoker wants to give up smoking but doesn’t) although necessary for compliance are not

always sufficient. All an ethical argument should be able to provide is demonstrable adequate theoretical justification and motivation *capable* of motivating ethical action, even if it cannot guarantee ethical action in every instance (Spence 2006, pp. 305-345). That will require ethical perfection that only a benevolent God possesses and potentially perhaps a super rational and intelligent android that always acts in accordance with adequate justificatory and motivational rational reasons for ethical action. We humans must settle for less.

If successful, the model proposed overcomes the problem of intra-national and inter-national cultural and moral relativism. I believe it does.

3. A PROPOSED SOLUTION

Beginning with a definition of information, this section of the paper will seek to determine how the production, communication and uses of digital information on the internet (*interformation*) can in principle be epistemologically and ethically evaluated in terms of the notions of both what is *right* and what is *good*.

To that end, this section will first provide a normative account of information based on the traditional definition of knowledge as *justified true belief*. This normative account of information is required in demonstrating and describing the generic ethical commitments that necessarily arise in the production, communication and uses of information, understood as a species of knowledge. A central claim of the paper is that these informational processes commit all rational agents to both epistemological and ethical conduct; specifically, it commits all agents to epistemological and ethical values such as accuracy, justification, truthfulness, honesty, trustworthiness, integrity and generally respect of other agents' moral rights, that for the purpose of this paper will be defined as rights to freedom and wellbeing (Gewirth 1978 Beyleveld 1991 and Spence 2006).

Of course there may be other forms of "information" that cannot be fully accounted for and explained by the primarily epistemological account of information proposed in this paper. Information as a form of *personal expression*, such as for example, the personal information one might post about oneself on the Internet through a blog or the kind of information one might create about one's avatar in a virtual environment, might be two such types of information. Due to constraints of space, I will not discuss these types of personal information (p-information), although suffice to say, even these more subjective types of p-information as forms of personal expression are subject to ethical evaluation if not always subject to an epistemological one.

For according to my reconstruction of Gewirth's argument for the PGC around the concept of dignity, agents not only have prima facie rights to freedom and wellbeing to engage in their individual purposive actions, but also rights to freedom and wellbeing for the preservation and maintenance of their personal dignity both individually and communally as members of a particular cultural group. Strictly with regard to their personal dignity, I argue that agents hold their rights to freedom and wellbeing absolutely (Spence 2006, pp. 159-213). As such,

agents should not express themselves using p-information in ways that are conducive to the degradation of the personal dignity of other agents. A person's avatar, for example, should not adopt expressions of conduct or p-information that can be shown to be conducive to the degradation of the personal dignity of other avatars in a virtual world environment such as *Second Life*. Racial vilification, even as a form of personal expression on the Internet either through a blog or through a virtual world would be considered ethically objectionable according to my proposed model that prescribes respect for all persons, both with regard to their rights of freedom and wellbeing as it relates to their purposive agency and to their personal dignity.

Following the analysis of a normative account of information and the necessary ethical commitments to which it gives rise, the paper will then offer a theoretical account of the *good* derived from the notion of rights, specifically the generic rights to freedom and wellbeing that all agents have, both individually and collectively as a society, as matter of rational necessity. This unified account of *the right and the good* (Spence 2006, pp. 217-281) is required for offering a dialectical and objective framework for assessing the notion of a *good life*, more specifically, the essential conditions that must be present for a good life. Freedom and wellbeing as the necessary features of all purposive action in Alan Gewirth's moral theory and the necessary conditions for personal dignity in my reconstruction of his argument provide the basis for a rich and flexible descriptive and prescriptive analysis of the essential conditions for such a life. Moreover, I will claim that such conditions, as the necessary features of all purposive action and successful action in particular, are universal and apply globally. As such, my proposed model seems well suited to the task, at least in principle.

Using as its departure point Alan Gewirth's theory of *self-fulfillment* (Gewirth, 1998) as well as the notion of *eudemonia* of the Hellenistic philosophers, specifically the Epicureans and the Stoics the paper will advance an applied universal *neo-stoic* model for analyzing and evaluating the notion of a good life, one that is applicable to both individuals and society as a whole (Spence 2006, pp. 393-442).

Finally, the paper will show how this unified neo-stoic model of the right and the good can be applied to objectively and universally evaluate the cultural quality of digital information on the Internet or interformation, at least both as *information* as well as *p-information*. More specifically, as it concerns its epistemic and ethical dimensions.

4. THE EPISTEMOLOGY AND ETHICS OF INFORMATION

This key section of the paper will critically examine and evaluate the concepts of "information" and "knowledge". Beginning with a simple definition of the concept of *information* as "the communication of instructive knowledge" (Shorter Oxford Dictionary) the concept of *knowledge* in turn will be defined as "justified true belief". Using this traditional epistemological definition of knowledge, this section of the paper will develop a normative account of information.

Briefly, the argument is as follows: Insofar as information is a type of knowledge it must comply with the epistemological conditions of justification and truth. And insofar as the communication and dissemination of information is based on the justified and rightful expectation among its users that such information should meet the minimal conditions of justification and truth, so that such information can be perceived to be reliable and hence trustworthy, then both producers, communicators and users of information are ethically committed to the informational principles of justification and truth on the basis of widely recognized and accepted epistemological criteria. Those epistemic criteria will in the main comprise objectivity as well as the independence and reliability of the sources that generate the information. The epistemology of information in turn commits its producers, communicators and users to certain ethical principles and values, such as accuracy, truthfulness, honesty, trustworthiness and fairness, including justice, which requires in the case of the media conceived as the Fourth Estate and the government, for example, the equal and fair distribution of the informational goods to all citizens. Thus information has an intrinsic normative structure that commits everyone involved in its production, communication and use to its ethical production, processing and dissemination.

For example, certain media practices such as *media release journalism* (Simmons, P and Spence, E.H., 2006), which misleadingly and deceptively disseminate media release information produced by Public Relations professionals and presented as objective and independent information through print or broadcast media sources (newspapers, television and radio) as “news” without any disclosure that these so called “news stories” are sourced from media releases produced by PR professionals on behalf of their clients, often verbatim and sometimes with the journalists’ bylines attached to them, are ethically objectionable. They are so, because they are designed to deceive and do deceive the public by stealth, sometimes in collusion with journalists and government representatives. Moreover, these practices constitute corruption for they are conducive to the corruption of the informational processes that are essential for informing citizens on matters of public interest in an objective, truthful and fair manner (Spence, 2005). Such practices, which once appeared only in the old corporate media (newspapers, television and radio), have increasingly become more prevalent on the Internet, for example, in blogs. Media deception is demonstrably unethical on the basis of the PGC because it can actually or potentially at least violate the rights to freedom and wellbeing that people have generally as agents and specifically, as citizens that require accurate, reliable and trustworthy information on matters of public interest. More generally, media deception through collusion by PR professionals, journalists and government representatives, violate all citizens’ rights to freedom and wellbeing collectively by undermining the democratic process itself that requires the truthful, fair and objective production and dissemination of information on matters of public interest. It is partly for that reason that media control is sought and exercised by totalitarian regimes, such as China or Iran, for example, that do not want their citizens to be well informed.

5. A UNIFIED ACCOUNT OF THE RIGHT AND THE GOOD AND A GOOD LIFE

Briefly the argument in outline: A unified account of the right and the good will be advanced and defended on the basis of an indirect application of Alan Gewirth's Principle of Generic Consistency (PGC). I will then advance my own neo-stoic eudaimonistic account of Gewirth's theory of self-fulfillment (Spence 2006, pp.393-442). The objective is to show that a good life is one that is at least minimally capable of enabling a person to attain self-fulfillment or eudaimonia. A good life in turn is capable of attaining self-fulfillment or eudaimonia if it accords with the requirements of morality in accordance with the PGC, which are universally mandatory, and those requirements can more successfully be complied with through the inculcation of the virtues and the moral sentiments, in accordance with an indirect application of the PGC.

Insofar as the PGC requires all agents, including informational agents, to act ethically or at least acknowledge that they ought to act ethically, specifically to respect the rights of freedom and wellbeing of all agents including their own, and insofar as virtues of character such as the cardinal virtues of justice, courage, moderation and prudence, as well as the Humean moral sentiments, such as sympathy (positive) and remorse (negative), can be conceived as enabling dispositions that allow agents generally and informational agents specifically to act ethically in compliance with the PGC, then the inculcation of those virtues and cultivation of those sentiments are also rationally required, at least prudentially (Spence 2006, pp. 217-281). Hence, the inculcation of the virtues of character and the cultivation of the moral sentiments, as enabling dispositions for acting ethically, especially under difficult circumstances, are essential for leading a good life, a life that can potentially lead to self-fulfillment or eudemonia, and as such are themselves good – but good for what? They are good because they are essential for a good life, objectively conceived, not just as means but ultimately also as ends. Not only instrumentally but also intrinsically good for they assist a person in living a life with integrity, one in which one's desires and preferences are congruent and track one's reasons and motivations for action as constrained by the ethical requirements of the PGC. Insofar as integrity and the avoidance of internal conflict or cognitive dissonance are intrinsic goods, the virtues and moral sentiments which together with one's minimal ethical commitments as required by the PGC inform and form the constituent parts of one's integrity as a person, are also intrinsically good. I will now briefly argue this on the basis of a Neo-Stoic model of eudemonia (Spence 2006, pp. 393-442), based on Gewirth's theory of self-fulfillment (Gewirth, 1998).

“Happiness.. is the polestar of our ethical theory” (Becker 1998, p. 138).

According to the stoics⁶, eudaimonia or happiness is not something that happens to you by chance, like winning the lottery, but rather something that one *achieves* through becoming perfectly rational and virtuous. Only few people can ever achieve eudaimonia because only a few people can become truly virtuous. At the limit, the sage is viewed by the stoics as an ideal exemplar; someone to be looked upon as a role model for those aspiring to become happy through becoming wise and virtuous. Becoming happy or eudaimon for the stoics was thus considered a *katorthoma* or supreme achievement. Something earned, not something given. But though difficult, the attainment of happiness through virtue was not only practically possible but also prescribed by nature; in particular, rational human nature. Insofar as becoming virtuous was within everyone's control, so was happiness (Becker L and Becker C, 1992, p. 1211).

In *Self-fulfillment*⁷, Gewirth distinguishes between self-fulfillment as *aspiration – fulfillment* and self-fulfillment as *capacity – fulfillment*. The former he identifies as the satisfaction of one's deepest desires, the latter as the process and goal of making the best of oneself. The difference between the two as Gewirth puts it,

“is that aspirations and their fulfillment are tied more closely to person's actual desires, while capacity-fulfillment bears more on making the best of oneself and thus serves as a normative guide to what desires one ought to have, , where this ‘ought’ may (but need not) go beyond person's actual desires”.

He goes on to say that the putative connection of his two notions of self-fulfillment as aspiration-fulfillment and capacity-fulfillment with happiness “brings out further why self-fulfillment is so highly valued as a superlative condition of the self” (1998:14-15). Clearly, it is Gewirth's notion of capacity-self fulfillment that is equivalent to stoic eudaimonia.

From a close examination of *Self-fulfillment*, it becomes clear that Gewirth's notion of self-fulfillment as capacity-fulfillment has all the essential characteristics of stoic eudaimonia. In claiming this, I take Gewirth's notion of self-fulfillment as capacity-fulfillment to be, with regard to its equivalence to stoic eudaimonia, a *2nd-order type of self-fulfillment*. That is, self-fulfillment, qua rational human being. A person can attain *1st order self-fulfillment* by becoming the best he can possibly become, given his particular aspirations and capacities, in a certain specific activity, for example, the best tennis player. However, that person may nevertheless fail to become self-fulfilled at the *2nd order level of self-fulfillment*

⁶ My selection of the central doctrines of stoic ethics is based primarily on a number of representative secondary sources from contemporary stoic scholarship that support a consensus on what constitutes the central doctrines of stoic ethics. This consensus concurs with my own general reading of stoic texts and stoic philosophy. In this regard, I consider that selection to be commonplace and uncontroversial. These sources are: Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); abbreviated for reference to (MH). Julia Annas, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); abbreviated for reference to (PEON). Laurence C. Becker, *A New Stoicism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998); abbreviated for reference to (ANS). A.A.Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy – Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, 2nd Edition); abbreviated for reference to (HP). Gisela Striker, *Essays On Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); abbreviated for reference to (EHEE). Gisela Striker, “Stoicism” in Lawrence C. Becker and Charlotte B. Becker, editors, *Encyclopedia of Ethics* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992); abbreviated for reference to (EE). Specifically with regard to the stoic notion of eudaimonia see (EE:2011);(ANS:127; 138-149; 150-56); (HP:197;234); (EHEE:182; 194; 224).

⁷ Specifically, see *Self-fulfillment*, pp. 14-16;18;25;50;62;85;107;182-89.

because he does not succeed in becoming the best person, qua rational human being, he can possibly become. The attainment of such 2nd order self-fulfillment which is equivalent, as I claim, to stoic eudaimonia, would only be possible for a Gewirthian neo-stoic sage and his stoic counterpart. Lesser mortals who do not succeed in becoming perfectly rational and virtuous in all their life plans and activities, would be able to attain 1st order self-fulfillment in their specific activities, but would only be able to attain 2nd order self-fulfillment first by becoming neo-stoic or stoic sages. Henceforth, I will also use the term “happiness” inter-changeably with both Gewirth’s notion of “self-fulfillment” and the Stoic notion of “eudaimonia”.

Self-fulfillment as capacity-fulfillment is the primary focus of Gewirth in *Self-fulfillment*. As for the stoics, so too for Gewirth, self-fulfillment as capacity-fulfillment is an achievement, one that requires, as in stoic ethics, a life lived in agreement with both reason and morality. For in both Stoic and Gewirthian ethics, human rational nature as an integral part of a rational and divine Universe (as in the case of the Stoics), or as rational purposive agency, (as in the case of Gewirth), prescribes that one should make the best of oneself. And this in turn requires, at a minimum, living both an ethical and a virtuous life. According to Gewirth,

“morality ...gives counsel and precepts for the self’s having a good life through personal development of one’s capacities whereby one makes the best of oneself” (1998: 107).

It is self-fulfillment, through its relation to purposiveness and the fulfillment of capacities in making the best of oneself, that Gewirth locates the meaning of life. It is not, as in Stoicism, a metaphysical meaning that emanates from a divine and rational all purposeful Universe, but rather a human all too human meaning, one that emanates from our own rational purposive nature. It is this inherent purposiveness aligned to our rationality that drives us on to the perfection of our individual selves and not some promise of a metaphysical reward in this life, as in the stoics, or a reward in some other transcendent life as in Plato. Gewirth’s self-fulfillment is wholly naturalistic. For Gewirth,

“the meaning of life Consists in the pursuit and attainment of the values of personalist morality as guided by the rational justification of universalist morality and the analysis of freedom and well-being as central to the highest development of the virtues based upon these necessary goods of action” (1998:189).

However, for practical purposes, both stoic eudaimonia and Gewirthian self-fulfillment amount to the same thing: a quest for making the best of oneself in agreement with one’s intrinsic rational human nature that accords with an ethical and virtuous life - one that ultimately leads to eudaimonia or self-fulfillment. As in Stoicism, so to in Gewirth’s ethical schema, self-fulfillment is a “maximalist” concept (1998: 216) for it involves the perfection of oneself through the perfection

of one's human rational nature⁸. And as in Stoicism, so to in Gewirth's ethical theory, self-fulfillment is something to be aimed at as an ideal, a practically possible target, but one that may never be completely reached. As Gewirth says, "self-fulfillment is far more a process than a finished product" (1998: 226).

It seems that for Gewirth as for the Stoics before him, self-fulfillment is something that perhaps only a sage can achieve. For mere mortals like the rest of us, the process is all one can hope for. As the Greek poet Constantine Cavafy remarked in a highly suggestive poetic line (*Ithaca*), it is the journey itself that ultimately counts. For in undertaking it we stand to become wiser if not completely wise. This perhaps accords with what Gewirth tells us:

"There is no climactic nirvana,
but there can be sequences
of self-improvement that
overcome the effects of alienation
and achieve cherished values
One's best is never finalized, but it can be more fully
approached" (1998: 227).

Another central feature of the stoic conception of happiness is its intrinsic relation to virtue. For as noted earlier, virtue as the primary comprehensive goal of human nature, is not only the essential means for the attainment of happiness, but more importantly, it is constitutive of happiness or eudaimonia (HP:197). In being the end or goal of life, virtue is both the means and the end of a happy life. The means, for the development and inculcation of virtue leads to happiness; and the end, because its possession as the only good guarantees a good life; for virtue is constitutive of happiness and its possession as the only good necessarily guarantees one's happiness. Another related characteristic of happiness is its self-sufficiency; for insofar as virtue as the only good is entirely within one's control, and that alone is sufficient for happiness, then happiness results from virtuous self-sufficiency (HP:234).

An important qualification, however, must be made to the view that happiness and virtue in stoic ethics are so intimately and intrinsically connected, that one cannot tell them apart, and as a result, one might then be led to view stoic happiness as nothing more than a life of virtue. This would be a mistake, however. For as Lawrence C. Becker correctly points out, stoic virtue is not the same as say Kantian duty (ANS: 150-51). There is joy in stoic ethics over and above the state of just being virtuous and always doing the right thing out of a grudging sense of duty. In stoicism the possession of virtue fills one's soul with joy similarly to how a state of health and fitness fills one with a general sense of wellbeing, both physically and psychologically. The stoic sage, as the sage in Plato's *Symposium*

⁸ When comparing Gewirthian self-fulfillment to Stoic eudaimonia let it be understood that I am referring specifically to Gewirth's 2nd order, or ideal notion of self-fulfillment.

standing at the top of the ladder of human perfection and gazing at the Form of the Good, is in love with the Good⁹ and that alone fills him with abundant joy.

Julia Annas (MH:329-35) rightly insists, contrary to the view that stoic eudaimonia is nothing more than a life of virtue, we must take stoic eudaimonists at their word for ultimately what they are offering us is an account of a happy life and not just a virtuous one. And these two things are, though intrinsically connected, conceptually distinct, as are shape and size, for example, although shape and size are intrinsically connected, they are nevertheless, conceptually distinct.

Insofar as virtue is the only good and virtue is entirely within one's control, then possession of the only good is both necessary and sufficient for happiness and potentially, within the reach of everyone. Moreover, sages like Socrates and the Buddha are real exemplars that render this view not a mere philosophical abstraction but a real practical possibility.

From the two propositions that human virtue is rational perfection, and that the perfection of one's reason is in agreement with nature, the stoics inferred that virtue is good, the only good, for it alone allows one to live in agreement with nature (EE:1209). Moreover, being a function of human rationality virtue is within one's rational control and as the only good, its possession leads to happiness or eudaimonia. That virtue is the only good follows from the view that only virtue is unconditionally good. For in all circumstances virtuous conduct is in agreement with nature which alone determines what is good. Hence, virtue is the only good because it allows one to live in accordance with nature.

Whereas health, wealth, friends and social status might be 'good' sometimes, they are not always good as their possession may not only not result in a virtuous life in agreement with nature, but worse, it may lead one to unethical and vicious actions that are bad because such actions are not in agreement with nature; on the contrary, they are in disagreement with nature because, ultimately, they are inconsistent with one's rational nature.

The above analysis is I believe in keeping with the general features of stoic ethics concerning the sufficiency of virtue for happiness¹⁰. What emerges is the following schema:

- (1) Virtue is the perfection of one's rational nature.
- (2) Virtue as the perfection of one's rational nature allows one to live in agreement with nature.

⁹ In her review of Martha Nussbaum's *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (1997), Marilyn Friedman points out that the "idea of love for all humanity", is mentioned by Nussbaum "no less than fourteen times" (*Cultivating Humanity*, pages 6, 7, 13, 14, 36, 61, 64, 67, 72, 84, 103, 222, 259, 292)—see Marilyn Friedman, "Educating for World Citizenship" *Ethics* (April 2000): 589. Nussbaum's "love for all humanity" seems essentially similar to the 'love of the Good' which, as the primary motivation for doing what is right, I attribute to both the stoic and the neo-stoic.

¹⁰ In my analysis I have followed closely Laurence C Becker's insightful neo-stoic and stoic analysis on the sufficiency thesis of stoic eudaimonia (ANS:108-158).

- (3) As the only thing that allows one to live a life in agreement with nature, virtue is the only good.
- (4) As such, virtue is unconditionally good.
- (5) Only possession of what is unconditionally good can render one happy.
- (6) Therefore, since only virtue is unconditionally good, only virtue can make one happy.
- (7) Virtue is completely within every rational person's control.
- (8) Hence, every rational person (because everyone is inherently rational) can potentially become happy and moreover must aim at becoming happy by becoming virtuous.

The above 8-point outline renders, I hope clearly, the intrinsic relationship between the central features of stoic ethics: reason, virtue, nature and eudaimonia. Moreover, the outline draws attention to both the descriptive as well as the prescriptive characteristics of Stoicism. Furthermore, it highlights the ideal and developmental aspects of stoic ethics. However ideal, the status of sagehood, as the only possible state for true and lasting happiness, remains a practical possibility for every rational person. In the *Tusculan Disputations*, Cicero denotes the whole book V to a defense of the necessity and sufficiency of virtue for happiness. Laurence C. Becker has identified the following premises as the key premises in Cicero's argument (ANS: 152):

- (1) "No one can be happy except when good is secure and certain and lasting" (V.xiv.40).
- (2) The good of virtue is secure and certain and lasting because (a) once achieved, its maintenance is within the agent's control (V.xiv.42), and (b) it is free from the disturbances of the soul that produce wretchedness (V.xv.43).
- (3) Moreover, in its affective dimension, a virtuous life is characterized by tranquility and joy, and thus may unproblematically be described as a happy life (V.xv.43)
- (4) No form of happiness can be good unless it includes, or is founded upon, virtue, or what is right (V.xv.44-5)

Gewirth's attention to the virtues and their relationship to both rationality and morality, mediated through the PGC, is extensive and comprehensive. What will concern us in this section is Gewirth's account of the relationship between virtue and self-fulfillment. The relationship as expressed by Gewirth appears to be as follows: Insofar as morality is intrinsically related to self-fulfillment as capacity-fulfillment (1998:78-79), and insofar as the virtues are essential in enabling rational agents to act and live ethically in compliance with the requirements of the PGC (1998:135), then the virtues are also intrinsically related to self-fulfillment (1998:87). The above described relationship between virtue and self-fulfillment appears, in the first instance, to be instrumental. That is, virtues are essential because they are effective means for ethical development thus enabling one to comply more effectively with both the negative and positive requirements of the PGC.

This instrumental understanding of the virtues is also part of the developmental aspect of stoic ethics. By aiming and attempting to act and live virtuously one gradually becomes inculcated in virtuous conduct through habituation.

However, there is also, as in stoic ethics, a constitutive aspect of the virtues in Gewirth's model of self-fulfillment. Once one becomes habituated to acting ethically in compliance with the PGC, then virtuous conduct becomes, as it were, one's *second* nature. In the Gewirthian neo-stoic sage, at the limit of virtuous perfection, however, virtue becomes, together with rationality, the sage's *first* and only nature. The perfection of reason and virtue, combine and match in the neo-stoic sage, and though remaining conceptually distinct, become in the sage's actions, *practically* indistinguishable. Thus the neo-stoic sage acts virtuously not only because his reason demands it, but more importantly because his reason is attuned to virtuous conduct. Unlike the Kantian 'sage', the Gewirthian neo-stoic sage, like his stoic counterpart, does the right thing out of love for the good and not out of a joyless sense of duty. The neo-stoic sage, like his stoic predecessor, enjoys being virtuous and this, unlike the Kantian sage, does not in any way diminish his goodness or his happiness.

The *developmental* and the *constitutive* aspects of virtue are illustrated by Gewirth in the following passage:

“There is a difference, however, between one's having a duty to act from a virtue and one's having a duty to try to develop a virtue. It is the latter that is required for capacity-fulfillment” (1998: 135).

Once, however, one becomes self-fulfilled, by becoming perfectly virtuous qua rational person, then one's developmental virtue becomes constitutive both of his character and of his happiness or self-fulfillment. Acting out of virtue for a Gewirthian neo-stoic sage, as for the stoic sage of antiquity, is acting out of his perfected rational nature. There is, in contrast to the Kantian 'sage', no separation in the stoic sage between the two distinct thoughts “this is what I *want* to do” and “this is what I *ought* to do”. Acting out of desire and acting out of virtue become in the neo-stoic and stoic sage alike one and the same thing.

“Virtue is not defined by the consequences in the world which it succeeds in promoting but by a pattern of behavior that follows necessarily from a disposition perfectly in tune with Nature's rationality (emphasis added)” (HP: 192).

The above definition of stoic virtue is very much in keeping with Gewirth's own understanding of virtue. Namely, a “disposition perfectly in tune with human rationality” where *human nature* as rational purposive agency replaces the metaphysical notion of stoic *Nature*. And for Gewirth, so too for the stoics, “the right thing to do is that which accords with virtue, and this is equivalent to saying that it accords with the *nature of a perfect rational being* (emphasis added)” (HP:

192). For Gewirth the right thing to do accords with the requirements of the PGC which in turn accords with the natural property of “rational purposive agency”. That, in turn, requires the development and inculcation of the virtues as the enabling dispositions for acting and living ethically. And acting and living virtuously then accords, at least for the neo-stoic sage, with the nature of a rational purposive agent.

Insofar as health, wealth, fame, and social status, some of the stoic preferred indifferents, are not essential for complying with the requirements of the PGC, and moreover, under certain circumstances their possession may result in the violation of those requirements, then virtue would appear to be, as for the stoics so too for Gewirth, the only unconditional good. Unconditional, because only virtue is under all circumstances, at least in principle, *capable* of enabling a rational purposive agent to act in accordance with the negative and positive requirements of the PGC. I say only *capable*, because like rationality, virtue cannot motivate a sociopath or a psychopath to behave ethically. This is partly because the sociopath’s and psychopath’s rational nature has, in some way, become dysfunctional.

But even if virtue as the only good, understood as the only unconditional good that is capable of enabling a rational purposive agent to act and live ethically, is necessary for self-fulfillment, is it sufficient? The quick answer is that virtue is not sufficient for the self-fulfillment of the person who has not yet achieved stoic or neo-stoic sagehood but it is for the person who has attained it. It is not sufficient for the person who falls short of stoic or neo-stoic sagehood, because under adverse circumstances his happiness or self-fulfillment may be compromised or worse, adversely affected, due to the imperfection of his virtue. A tiny tear in a full sail, that under fare conditions might go unnoticed, may cause the boat serious damage or worse, cause it to sink, when a freak storm strikes. Similarly, the partial perfection of virtue in a person who acts and lives ethically under normal favorable conditions may be undermined by a misfortune or extraordinary circumstances, such as war. Under such adverse circumstances, that person may lose both her virtue and happiness. And for the stoics losing one’s virtue is tantamount to losing one’s happiness. Hecuba is an illustrative example of such a partially virtuous person who loses both her virtue and happiness by being driven through tragic misfortune to commit terrible deeds. Could Hecuba have remained happy in the face of such overwhelming misfortune if she were a stoic sage? The stoics would give an affirmative answer to that question. Had Hecuba been a stoic sage, she would have retained both her virtue and her happiness. For ultimately, her own virtue, the source of her happiness, was entirely within her control. This may seem preposterous and a reason for rejecting the sufficiency thesis. However, on closer analysis the sufficiency thesis does not appear preposterous but reasonable; at least it ought to appear reasonable to rational agents.

In what follows I will attempt to construct a Gewirthian neo-stoic version of the sufficiency thesis (premises 1-7):

1. First, let us distinguish developmental from constitutive virtue. *Developmental* virtue is virtue that enables one to become ethically a good person. Its function

is primarily instrumental as physical fitness is for health. However, once one becomes ethically good, in the sense that one becomes disposed to always act out of virtue, which at this stage of one's development has become identical with one's rational purposive agency, virtue becomes constitutive of that person's ethical goodness. To use the same previous analogy, one's physical fitness is no longer merely instrumental for becoming healthy but it becomes, once one attains and maintains good health, constitutive of one's health and general lifestyle. When constitutive, virtue, like physical fitness, is its own reward – it becomes together with moral goodness an end in itself and not merely an instrumental means for ethical conduct.

2. As regards developmental virtue, rational purposive agents have a duty to develop and inculcate the virtues of character in themselves as an essential means for complying with the PGC's requirements.¹¹
3. However, a purposive agent cannot begin to develop those essential developmental virtues unless he has the minimal material, and other personal and social conditions that are required for the preservation and maintenance of his freedom and wellbeing. For without the conditions sufficient for preserving and maintaining one's freedom and wellbeing, as the necessary conditions of one's rational purposive agency, one cannot successfully maintain one's rational purposive agency.
4. Insofar as agents cannot by their own efforts provide the minimal conditions for the preservation and maintenance of their freedom and wellbeing, other agents should, both individually, and collectively through the various communal and state institutions, assist those agents in procuring and securing those minimal conditions, when they can do so at no comparable cost to themselves. The "comparable cost" is proportionally minimized when the cost is not borne by individuals but collectively by the community through its various formal and informal voluntary institutions. This is in keeping with Gewirth's "community of rights" thesis.
5. Hence, insofar as agents require some minimal material, personal and social conditions to function as agents, through the preservation and maintenance of their freedom and wellbeing, those conditions are essential for the ethical and virtuous development of those agents. Therefore, minimal conditions of health, wealth, education, housing, employment, sufficient for the preservation and maintenance of an agent's rights to freedom and wellbeing, are essential for the agent's ethical development and ultimately, his self-fulfillment. For without them he can't function as a purposive agent, let alone an ethical agent.

¹¹ Gewirth argues that "the PGC shows that ...virtues are good to have precisely because persons who have them are much more likely to do what the PGC requires and to make more effective use of their freedom and well-being as parts of a good life" (1998: 35). "More likely" is a probability statement. Insofar as courage, moderation, prudence and justice, to mention just the cardinal virtues, seem essential for compliance with both the negative and positive requirements of the PGC, I will claim that the value one ascribes to Gewirth's probability statement in the above quoted passage should be very high. With the progressive inculcation and habituation of the virtues in a rational agent, that value approaches 1.

This interim conclusion may at first appear to undermine the sufficiency thesis. However, on closer reflection we can see that it doesn't, as the premises (2-5) above refer to developmental and not constitutive virtue. It will be recalled that the sufficiency thesis is only intended to refer to constitutive virtue, and in particular, the constitutive virtue of the stoic sage. It is not intended to refer to developmental virtue, and in particular, the developmental virtue of one who does not aspire to become a stoic sage; or if he does so aspire, has not made the mark yet. Either way, the developmental virtue of those agents who have not yet acquired constitutive virtue, or who do not aspire to such virtue, is not sufficient for stoic happiness or Gewirthian neo-stoic "ideal self-fulfillment".

As I mentioned earlier, by "Gewirthian neo-stoic ideal self-fulfillment" I mean a second-order ideal self-fulfillment that is attained through the perfection of one's rational and virtuous character, qua human being. This ideal self-fulfillment is to be contrasted with a first-order normal self-fulfillment that is attained through becoming the best that one can become in one's chosen activity, profession, or role. For example, the best tennis player, the best trombone player, the best chef, the best chess-player, or the best parent. Such bestness need not be determined arbitrarily by a comparison with other tennis players or chefs around the world but by some acknowledged general standards of what constitutes *excellence* in a particular activity, profession, or role. Running a two-hour marathon is at present considered the standard of excellence for marathon runners. Individual marathon runners measure their own particular marathon running bestness, "their personal best" against that standard by taking into account generally acknowledged handicaps such as age, physical limitations such as blindness and other relevant differences such as gender. In the case of what constitutes bestness or excellence in a person, qua human being, the stoics have nominated rational and virtuous excellence. In keeping with that standard, I want to suggest that Gewirth's ideal second-order self-fulfillment relates similarly to that stoic standard. To be an excellent human being, in a Gewirthian neo-stoic sense, is to be a person who has perfected one's reason and virtue in agreement with the precepts of the PGC and who acts accordingly in all that he does. As for the stoics, so too for Gewirth, such an excellent human agent is a sage. In Gewirth's case, a neo-stoic sage. This ideal second-order understanding of self-fulfillment is evident in the following passage from Gewirth:

"what has emerged from the considerations in this book is that although in important respects self-fulfillment is never completely attainable, it can be approximated in a social context that makes adequate provision of one's efforts as guided by reason" (1998:226).

Importantly, Gewirth's ideal self-fulfillment can best be approached within an egalitarian social context that recognizes everyone's right to first-order self-fulfillment but in addition recognizes the desirability for working communally to create a society or a *cosmopolis* in which the optimal conditions for attaining second-order ideal self-fulfillment are available to everyone; a cosmopolis in which Socrates would never again have to drink the hemlock.

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As we have seen so far from premises (1 to 5) above, developmental virtue is not sufficient for stoic eudaimonia or Gewirthian neo-stoic ideal self-fulfillment (henceforth I will use “self-fulfillment” to mean second order ideal self-fulfillment; self-fulfillment qua human being, unless otherwise indicated). Is it nevertheless sufficient for constitutive virtue in the case of Gewirthian self-fulfillment? I will answer affirmatively that it is for the reasons expressed in premises (6-7) below:

6. First, let us assume that our Gewirthian neo-stoic sage has all the creature comforts of contemporary living. A car, a fully equipped house, a well paid job, a functional and flourishing family, good health, friends, fame, regular holidays to desired destinations, wealth and a social status to match. Everything a man or woman could ever want or need. Now imagine taking away piecemeal each one of those desirable possessions. Question: at what point exactly would our hypothetical neo-stoic sage stop feeling self-fulfilled? Can we imagine someone like Socrates or the Buddha feeling unhappy or unfilled because they lost any or all of those things? We know that the Buddha gave away all his princely possessions to become poor and homeless but wise. We think of Socrates as someone who felt self-fulfilled in the completeness and self-sufficiency of his virtue. He was uncompromisingly virtuous in both his teachings and his actions. Without laboring the point too much, the question regarding the sufficiency of virtue for happiness becomes the question of how much does a neo-stoic sage need to be happy or self-fulfilled apart from his perfect virtue. In keeping with Gewirth’s overall ethical theory and model of self-fulfillment, the answer that is presented to us is that a neo-stoic sage would require the minimal material, personal, and social conditions sufficient for preserving and maintaining his rational purposive agency. For without those conditions he would not be able to preserve and maintain his rational purposive agency, let alone his perfect virtue on which his self-fulfillment or happiness depends. But those minimal conditions, as in the case of Socrates, the Buddha, and possibly stoics such as Zeno or Epictetus, would indeed be the bare minimal conditions sufficient for preserving and maintaining rational purposive agency. Socrates chose the hemlock over exile, perhaps because he thought that the conditions in exile would not have allowed him to preserve and maintain his rational purposive agency in any realistic or meaningful way.

In the Gewirthian sense of ideal self-fulfillment, Socrates was a social sage, one whose self-fulfillment though within his control, was partly constituted by his cultural and social attachments in the city of Athens. This is nor surprising, for as social animals our identity is at least partly constituted by our social and cultural attachments. Though less attached than normal agents, a sage is also a social being who functions best within a social and communal milieu. A sage is not and need not be a hermit, though a sage could choose to be one. We would then, under my Gewirthian construction of neo-stoicism, allow that, insofar as the neo-stoic sage is a socialized being, a minimal degree of sociability may be part of the minimal conditions sufficient for preserving and maintaining one’s rational agency. A social condition that would apply to both a sage and non-sage unlike. If I am right, this is I believe a welcome result for it would

otherwise seem unrealistic to maintain that in our contemporary complex world, a neo-stoic sage could successfully live as a sage in total isolation from any form or content of social or communal interaction. In keeping with the notion of social and political engagement, which was also an important feature of Stoicism, a minimal degree of sociability would therefore appear to be one of the minimal conditions for preserving and maintaining rational agency with regard to Gewirth's model of self-fulfillment.

7. In conclusion, constitutive virtue is sufficient for ideal self-fulfillment so long as rational purposive agency can be preserved and maintained¹². This will in turn require the presence of the material, personal and social conditions that are sufficient for the preservation and maintenance of rational agency, nothing more and nothing less. An interesting contrast that seems to support the social dimension of the neo-sagehood I have outlined above is a passage from Julia Annas:¹³ "virtue is sufficient for non-unhappiness, but for happiness the person must be able to use, not merely possess, virtue".

This contrast brings out quite nicely the contrast between the sage and the saintly hermit. The stoic sages were individuals such as Socrates, Zeno, Marcus Aurelius, Seneca, Epictetus, to name but a few, who "used" their virtue to better the lives of others and society as a whole. They were all social sages. In *Self-fulfillment*, Gewirth implies, and my construction makes this explicit, that the ideally self-fulfilled person is a neo-stoic *social sage*.

6. CONCLUSION

Beginning with the initial premise that as the Internet has a global character, the cultural evaluation of digital information on the Internet necessitates an evaluative model that is itself universal and global in character¹⁴, the paper proceeded to show that my Neo-Gewirthian Unified Account of the Right and the Good, based on Alan Gewirth's argument for the Principle of Generic Consistency, provides such a model. This is at least for three primary reasons:

- (a) Both the form and the content of the argument for the PGC provide the necessary conditions of justification and motivation for universal and global ethics. The formal condition, namely, that no purposive agent can deny that all purposive agents have rights to freedom and wellbeing on pain of self-contradiction, provides the rational justification. The content of the argument comprising freedom and wellbeing as the essential features of all purposive action, provide the material condition capable of motivating any putative rational agent to both claim rights to freedom and wellbeing for oneself as well as allow those rights for other purposive agents.

¹² The necessity of purposive agency as a pre-requisite for stoic, and in particular, neo-stoic eudaimonia or happiness is also alluded to by Martha Nussbaum, in *Symposium on Cosmopolitanism*, "Duties of Justice, Duties of Material Aid: Cicero's Problematic Legacy", *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, vol. 8, no. 2, (2000): 191.

¹³ Julia Annas, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999, p 45.).

¹⁴ I agree, therefore, with Gorniak-Kocikowska's claim that because of its global nature "computer ethics has to be regarded as global ethics" (1996).

- (b) An indirect application of the argument for the PGC shows that insofar as the virtues of character and the moral sentiments are enabling conditions for meeting the ethical requirements of the PGC, especially under difficult circumstances, then the inculcation of the virtues and the cultivation of the moral sentiments is also a rational requirement for any putative purposive agent. This connection between rights on the one hand and virtues and moral sentiments on the other provide the ground for a unified account of the right and the good. Thus an agent who complies with these dual requirements of the PGC can in principle be in a position to do what is right and good. In the absence of moral perfection, at least in most cases.
- (c) After establishing a universal and unified account of the Right and the Good the paper was able to demonstrate that there is an intrinsic connection between my proposed unified account of the Right and the Good and a Good Life. For insofar as people value their happiness or self-fulfillment, then any person who lives their life in accordance with my proposed unified account of the Right and the Good, is was more likely to succeed in the attainment of happiness or self-fulfillment. That is to ay, live a Good Life.

The Neo-Gewirthian unified account of the Right And the Good, which also incorporates an account of a Goof Life in terms of a Neo-Stoic notion of eudaimonia or happiness, which I have argued for above, provides a universal and global model of ethics that can be used to evaluate issues and practices that arise generally in computer ethics and in particular as they arise with regard to digital information on the Internet. Specifically, any informational practices or policies that actually or potentially violate the rights to freedom to wellbeing of people as individuals as well as collectively as communities, in both their epistemological and their personal modes of expression, are according to my universal and unified model of the Right and the Good, ethically objectionable. Insofar as they prevent or at least frustrate people both as individuals and collectively as communities to lead a good life, one that allows people to attain self-fulfillment or happiness, those practices and policies are also *bad* for they prevent or at least frustrate people from fulfilling themselves and becoming the best human beings they can possibly be, both in relation to what they aspire to be (aspiration-fulfillment) and what they are capable of becoming (capacity-fulfillment).

Although universal, my proposed unified model of the Right and the Good does not impose any uniformity on how one chooses to live one's life on-line or off-line, provided of course such a life is consistent with the minimal ethical requirements of the PGC. As such, the model in its generality is in principle compatible with more hedonistic accounts of the Good and the Good Life, provided such accounts are consistent with the minimal requirements of the PGC which stipulates universal respect for the rights of freedom and wellbeing of all purposive agents. Thus, for example, my Neo-Stoic and Neo-Gewirthian account of the Right and the Good and by extension the Good Life is compatible with a hedonistic Epicurean model of a Good Life, which although

based on the notion of pleasure is constrained by the requirements of morality and virtue, or at least ought to be.

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