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The Limits of Our Epistemic Position When Identifying Sainthood: The Controversy Between K. J. Clark and J. Hick

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Introduction

Gandhi, the Greek heroes, Padre Pio, and the Dalai Lama might not share similarities other than being diverse manifestations of the one "multiply realizable" idea of a "good person" (Trinkaus Zagzebski 2017, 19). Nonetheless, especially as supposedly *divinely inspired* people, all of them are widely admired for their moral transformation, praised for their virtue, devotion, and ability to sacrifice themselves to the glory of God (or "Ultimate Reality"[1]) and to the welfare of humanity.

Yet, we rarely try to justify why we believe ourselves to be in a sufficient epistemic position to evaluate other people's moral character appropriately. Considering that it is universally agreed upon that we cannot read other people's minds, and hence base our assessments on their actions, the philosopher Kelly James Clark's objection to following our common intuition must be taken seriously. My present analysis examines the controversy between the philosophers K. J. Clark and J. Hick on whether we can accurately identify internal moral progress from someone's good actions. Their views stand in radical opposition as they represent two contradictory approaches to the issue.

After briefly presenting the different ideas and definitions of saints that the two philosophers use in their arguments, I begin a detailed

[1] For the sake of our present analysis, I have chosen "Ultimate Reality" as an umbrella term. It is connected to what Clark repeatedly refers to in his work (Clark1997, e.g., 311 & res. 317), as well as Hick's notion of "ultimate reality" which can be distant and impersonal but also encompasses the idea from Western monotheistic thought "of the ultimate reality as an infinite, eternal, all-powerful, all-good personal being" (Hick 2006, 162).

explanation of the theoretical foundation of Clark's view and this issue's influence on the evaluation of a religious tradition's "success" as well as the role this plays for religious adherents. This is followed by a moral argument against holding Clark's view in practice.

Later, I contrast Clark with Hick's more pragmatic standpoint, which represents the common intuition that we can indeed rightly assess a person's moral character from our epistemological position. Finally, I juxtapose the fundamental aspects of the two positions and highlight additional challenges that supporters of both sides must resolve. Laying out the insufficiencies of the two approaches, I reject them equally. This analysis constructs the field for the discourse on the epistemic relation between people, which forms the basis for any discussions involving the recognition of saints or other moral authorities.

1. Saints And Morally Good Acts

Presenting the two philosophers' conceptions and deriving therefrom my own working definition of sainthood serves as a preface and an explanation as to why the debate can be, to a certain extent, applied to universally question our ability to judge people as good, even outside of the religious context. This seems intuitively clear considering that we admire saints, in contrast to non-moral exemplars like geniuses, artists, or athletes, for reaching the top of human capability for the spiritual and moral good (Trinkaus Zagzebski 2017, 1).

Clark assigns a key role to Hick's definition of spiritual transformation for his further argumentation (Clark 1997, 303). This "cognitive response to a transcendent reality" can be conceived as "the salvific transformation of human existence from natural self-centredness to a new orientation centred in the Real, a transformation which takes different concrete forms within different religious cultures" (Hick 2010, 716). For Hick, "[a] saint, then, is one in whom the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness is so much more advanced than in the generality of us that it is readily noticed" (Hick 1989, 301). Even though Clark adopts this motif, he never explicitly refers to "saints."

By contrast, Hick expresses forthrightly whom he considers to be saintly. For example, Mahatma Gandhi – a politically and socially active saint (Hick 2006, 183). However, Hick does not require of all saints an equivalent reputation or influence on the world to the reputation or influence of Gandhi. In daily life, they can be identified by their inspirational energy, which reflects the Transcendent Reality they are close to (183). Despite providing clear characteristics of saints, Hick does not draw a clear line between saints and other devoted religious believers and practitioners. He merely emphasizes the following traits: firstly, the category of "saints" can encompass people from all religious traditions. The fundamental characteristic of sainthood is the proximity to God (Hick 2006, 303) and the ability to inspire other people (183) through the creation of harmony (50). Nevertheless, by virtue of being human, a saint will always remain imperfect (183). Whereas in the past, saints would typically live in convents, isolated from the society, in recent centuries, they have tended to assume power and initiate reforms addressing contemporary issues of a political and social nature (183).

Clashing with Clark, for whom spiritual transformations are determined by the religious tradition one is immersed in since these beliefs constitute the necessary psychological precondition and motivation for an internal metamorphosis (Clark 1997, 319), Hick argues that ordinary people who are not affiliated with any religious tradition can qualify as saints. For example, people who devote their lives and resources to helping others out of a sense of moral duty towards humanity – rejecting religious conceptualizations – would belong to this category of secular saints (Hick 2006, 184).

Clark adopts the key theme of Hick's definition of saints, narrowing it down to the religious context only. Therefore, for convenience's sake, I will further utilize the term "saints" in reference to both Clark's and Hick's discourse. Since the difference between a saint and a normal devoted religious believer remains vague, I retain sainthood as a gradable concept, beginning at any religiously motivated or morally driven extraordinary metamorphosis enabling a person to contribute to a perceived good (to an outstanding degree compared to the average degree, observable in people in similar contexts).

Due to the obvious link to religion, where acts help identify saints (as it is the case for Hick), it is useful to contextualize the controversy within the framework for evaluating a moral act, prominent particularly in Christianity. Since I adopt Latin terminology in my work for describing the respective positions, I hereby introduce the classical ideas and terms for evaluating human acts: the morality of an action is determined by its circumstances, the intention of the actor (*finis operantis*) and the object chosen, basically the outcome of an action (*finis operis*) (The Holy See 1997, 1750-54). By contrast to formulation in other sources, throughout this analysis, the word "act," "action" or "deed" corresponds strictly to the "object chosen." In the controversy, Clark and Hick respond to whether the object of an action (*finis operis*) reflects the intention of the actor (*finis operantis*). Notably, if it is impossible to evaluate actions, then it would be pointless to argue about whether intentions are of the same moral quality. After all, even if they were linked, both would be unknown. The third aspect commonly taken into account when performing a moral evaluation of an act are the circumstances in which it takes place. They "contribute to increasing or diminishing the moral goodness or evil of human acts […]. Circumstances of themselves cannot change the moral quality of acts themselves" (The Holy See, 1754). However, these are not crucial for large parts of the theoretical discussion because Hick and Clark concentrate on the ability to assess the moral quality rather than the degree to which an act or person possesses this quality.

2. Clark's Position

2.1 The Agnostic Position

Since the label "saint" is based on the character and morality of a person, this process demands that we assess their character and/or morality from an outside perspective. Considering that we are unable to read other people's minds, our insights are based on what we can access – namely, a person's actions. In the case of a religious person, we evaluate the sincerity and success of the power of moral transformation, which is grounded in that person's religion, based on the actions that the adherent performs.

However, we certainly need to justify why we consider ourselves to be in an epistemic state to appropriately judge the morality of other people's characters. Clark points out that the evidence we can gain by observing our fellow human beings is not bulletproof. In other words, our inability to glimpse into someone else's mind to examine their intentions is an inherent limit of our epistemic position, which affects our ability to judge other people's character (Clark 1997, 316).

Undoubtedly, some people's acts might accurately reflect the sincerity of their character. But "a wicked person can appear just as righteous" (315-16). Thus, it is always possible that the wrong goal or idea could generate a person's motivation for an act. According to the so-called Perversity Explanation, one will justify the ability of practitioners of another religion to practise strict religious observance in a pessimistic way. To give an illustration, practices like leading an ascetic lifestyle will be considered to stem from the self-interested reason of trying to gain fame among other followers of that religion or trying to impress the upcoming generations (316). It is easy to come up with reasons why one might act admirably to deceive others.

Significantly, Clark does not make any distinction between the judgement of people's character based on ordinary good acts and remarkably good acts. Instead, the absolute agnostic principle does not allow for the possibility of any circumstances improving the moral quality of an act so far as to warrant the conclusion that a virtuous character stands behind the act.

2.2 Theoretical Context

The theoretical implications of the agnostic view, as well as its limits, are worth outlining. Significantly, Clark mentions the instance of a person admired as a moral saint whose motives we find questionable (315-16). Despite our intuition in this case, we need to accept the two-fold implications of Clark's standpoint. If we see someone perform charitable deeds, we are unable to know whether these were inspired by noble motives orby vile intentions.[2] Importantly, it becomes clear from this

[2] Notably, I mention only the observation of actions that we would deem morally good *per se*. In fact, I believe that one cannot argue that the same goes for morally

that Clark does not reject the idea that sincere morality exists, nor does he rebuff the notion that sainthood is achievable. In fact, he cannot dismiss either of these two claims. It is precisely here that Clark's core principle becomes evident: he steps back from the issue, accepting the impossibility of passing such judgements. Thus, in debates about whether a specific person performing charitable actions is a saint, neither side is backed up by valid arguments because neither party has privileged access to the moral character or intentions of the respective person. Accordingly, in contrast to Hick, Clark abstains from providing historical examples of sainthood.

Furthermore, Clark's argument affects the entire way of approaching related philosophical discourse about religious diversity. In general, the philosophical problem of the variety of religious traditions arises from the observation that people of seemingly equal intellectual competence and honest intentions arrive at fundamentally incompatible conclusions about the Ultimate Reality (Clark 1997, 303). Different explanations attempting to resolve this issue rely on acceptance of the different degrees of religious diversity present in the world. Followers of the Clark's view can draw conclusions and point out what certain propositions and explanations in this context would imply. Crucially, however, their argumentation will be based on unresolvable conditionals. If we hold that people's actions do not inevitably reflect their character, there is no way to find out (in this life) whether the condition is fulfilled. One of the premises mentioned by Clark that Hick uses as a part of his explanation for religious diversity, as well as a reason for rejecting other explanations, is the acceptance of the equal transformational success of the different religious traditions. According to Clark, one can dismiss such a hypothesis as being "simply unsupported by argument" (309), considering that we cannot identify with certainty whether an actual, fundamental spiritual change took place. Therefore, observation is not sufficient to oblige us to accept this strong premise.

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wrong actions. Analogously to the material implication in logic, a truly virtuous character cannot manifest itself in bad actions. In Clark's paper, there is no discussion about passing judgment on bad actions. Therefore, it will be omitted in our present analysis as well.

Summarizing, Clark's agnostic position relies fundamentally on the principle that we are unable to know a person's motivation through their actions.

2.3 Practical Consequences of Holding Clark's Position

Can we assume and apply this agnostic stance in practice in our daily lives? Or, more importantly, should we do it? Notably, in the philosophical debate, Clark's argument is strong. Nonetheless, he himself points out practical consequences that can make one strongly doubt whether this perspective would stand the test of implementability in real life.

Certainly, everybody judges. One chooses one's friends and partners by judging their sincerity and loyalty. Nevertheless, even people we deeply feel we know and trust, sometimes let us down; much less should we be able to rely on our judgement of people whose actions we have only heard about or who we do not know as closely. Generally, we interact with people under the assumption that we know the morality of their character. In daily life, it seems difficult or even impossible to really abstain from evaluations. In fact, the evaluative judgement of people appears crucial for building trust and relationships. But should we at least abstain from identifying saints? After all, having a reputation as a saint can lead to incredible fame, attention, recognition, and sometimes, even money. Therefore, there is more at stake than individual disappointment. Can we risk passing such judgements without proper evidence? There is a non-negligible possibility that we could be wrong.

Hence, it is relevant to investigate whether Clark's stance is applicable in practice or only reserved for the philosophical round table, since it is not the default position people normally adopt. However, Clark argues that the default conviction is psychologically advantageous for fostering the moral improvement of the believer. The problem is that being agnostic requires you to accept the possibility of all other religious traditions also granting access to transformation, even though others follow completely different procedures and devote themselves in a way which is incompatible with one's picture of the Ultimate Reality. Consequently, our perception of the Ultimate Reality might not be completely true.

According to Clark, the agnostic attitude diminishes one's prospects for transformation because it drains us of the psychologically necessary set of religious convictions fundamental for change to take place (317). Clark holds the assumption that human beings need to hold on to the hope that their devotion and moral and spiritual efforts are not useless (318). To make this point clearer, Clark provides an analogy involving the Easter bunny. Searching for eggs and presents at Easter motivates children to eagerly get up early and begin their search. If they learn that this is dispensable because the eggs will be there anyway, their excitement and anticipation will slowly fade away. Thus, their beliefs will lack the power to motivate them enough to rise early (317). Analogously, if one takes Clark's agnostic stance, one must consider the possibility that other traditions with entirely different processes may also help a person achieve transformation. Therefore, one's investment in a specific religious tradition might be simply redundant. This thought can be demotivating. Notably, not to the extent that the *conviction* about the equal success of other traditions would have. Nonetheless, if doubt is sown, any belief loses at least some of its motivational power. Few people are disciplined enough to continue their worship practices if they simultaneously hold that these might be in vain. Instead, people stop attending their religious associations' services because they lose faith in the privileged access to the divine end this tradition promises. Accordingly, they do not have a reasonable hope to motivate them. Thus, one exiles oneself from any possibility of transformation. To put it another way, "[a]gnosticism about the ultimate structures of moral and spiritual reality defeats the hope necessary for moral and spiritual growth" (319).

Notwithstanding, Clark states that he is incapable of dismissing the possibility of all religions rewarding their adherents equally (319). So, in theory, Clark holds that we are incapable of recognizing saints by their actions. In practice, we should nonetheless live as if we could see genuine spiritual transformation reflected in the admirable deeds of our religious fellows.

3. Hick's Position

3.1 Hick's Objection

In contrast to Clark, Hick's justification for his stance in the debate on determining whether somebody is a saint based on their actions is drawn from intuition and experience in everyday life. Hick clearly rejects agnosticism as an appropriate approach. Instead, he emphasizes the unquestionable link between actions and intentions.

Significantly, Hick tends to utilize the term "moral and spiritual fruits" (Hick 2006, 51, 71, 163)[3] to describe good actions in this context. Linguistically, this already implies that these "fruits" must be borne of a specific type of tree or character. Hick considers this as the most universal and common criterion for judging the genuine metamorphosis that theistic or non-theistic experiences generate in somebody's life (42). The most extreme interpretation of this view assumes that no evil act could come from righteous intentions and no benign act from wicked ones.[4] Therefore, it should be easy for us to recognize and justly judge a person as a saint.

Arguing in favour of the genuine access we have to the morality and character of our fellow human beings through their actions and lifestyles (183), Hick regards Clark's position as an "absurdity of which only (some) philosophers are capable" (211 [Footnote to p. 149]). Accordingly, Hick deploys an argument *ad absurdum* to disprove Clark's view. Hick points out that the acceptance of the view which is opposite to his would mean that the terms like "moral goodness" and "spiritual transformation" are, in essence, meaningless because we could not recognize them anyway. Instead, Hick views humans, allowing for exceptions among them, as inherently ethical beings (211).

Unlike Clark, Hick is convinced of the strong connection between the moral quality of an act and the morality of its actor. In other words, a morally good *finis operis* implies a morally good *finis operantis*. Interestingly, Saint Teresa of Ávila put forward a very similar line of thought in her autobiography. Analogously to Hick's idea that good fruits are borne of an inevitably good tree, St. Teresa of Ávila holds that

[3] The usage of this term was inspired by the biblical passage *A Tree and Its Fruit* (*English Standard Bible*, Matthew 7:15-20) that Hick himself cites (Hick 2006, 42).

[4] There is no decisive clarification here of what makes an act good. Therefore, one can argue that an action promoting the welfare of people, if based on vile intentions, is not actually good.

the new "jewels" (in essence, moral and virtuous behaviour) she possesses prove that someone (in essence, God) must have placed them in her (Teresa of Àvila 1995, 158-159). Thus, both Hick and St. Teresa of Ávila view righteous behaviour as inevitably linked to sincere motivations. Whether conveyed *via* the metaphor of fruits or jewels, the point remains the same: we should trust people's lifestyle and actions as genuine indicators of their internal change and morality. St. Teresa of Ávila uses the metaphor of jewels in order to argue against the idea that her change of conduct came from a source different than actual divine inspiration.

Agreeing with St. Teresa of Ávila, Hick elaborates on concrete examples of people whom he regards as bearing positive moral and spiritual fruits, or, in other words, carrying jewels in their chest. Significantly, these are people who left a mark in history and dedicated their lives to the welfare of the most disadvantaged of the world. The concept of sacrifice is strongly present. This includes not only the sacrifice made for others but also the sacrifice in the form of choosing an ascetic life (Hick 2006, 51). Therefore, while in principle righteous acts point to a virtuous character, the action itself, the intentions, as well as the circumstances, need to be exceptional for Hick to attribute to them the label of "sainthood." In other words, the degree of the action's moral goodness matters.

Furthermore, Hick mentions examples of people considered by others to be saints, who nevertheless do not think of themselves as such (183). This is interesting considering that, according to Clark's conclusion, the problem of not having access to other people's minds was the decisive factor in our incapacity to recognize saints. By contrast, Hick sees the privileged access to our own minds as no less than a hindrance from recognizing sainthood. In fact, Hick argues that "[n]one of [the four saints he personally met], *of course*, has for a moment thought of himself as a saint" (183, emphasis mine). It follows that Hick judges the outside perspective to be more accurate at identifying a person's sainthood, than the internal perspective of the person in question. In order to make sense of this, one needs to recall Hick's doubts about the idea of flawless humans. By contrast to the position sometimes assigned to religious believers - that a saint's heart should be completely free from any sort of temptation or sinful feelings like lust or envy (Martin 2010, 469) - Hick

questions the coherence of the idea of a perfect human being. Furthermore, he underlines the connection between sainthood and humanity and, therefore, between sainthood and defectiveness.[5] Even though he does not elaborate on that matter, we can assume that this could be due to the general idea that truly benevolent people are too harsh on themselves and, therefore, more aware of their deficiencies. Hence, they are more reluctant to view themselves as significantly superior to others.

Be that as it may, accepting Hick's proposition that we can recognize saints by their actions does not imply admitting that religious traditions other than our own are equally successful at creating saints. There is no one universal conception of a saint; thus, people will obviously differ in their characterization of sainthood.[6] As a result, Hick's argument is partially immune to Clark's criticism of the psychologically demotivating effects of accepting the transformative powers of all of the world religions. Nonetheless, Hick personally views spiritual transformation as equally powerful among adherents of different traditions. Hence, Clark's criticism remains valid.

Hick supports his view with a notion that guides most people in their daily lives and that most would intuitively agree with. Namely, he holds

[5] Arguably, to admit that people are always morally flawed while holding that good moral acts reflect the goodness of a person's character is self-contradictory. Instead, Hick simply accepts that behind every good act stand good intentions and the virtuosity of being able to self-sacrifice, but there is also inevitably some wickedness. It is not necessary that this wickedness directly motivated the good action, but it is nonetheless present in the character. For this reason, I find his dismissal of Clark's notion unreasonable. While Clark says that we are ignorant of what stands behind good actions, Hick apparently holds that we know that there are good intentions behind them, but, simultaneously, they are always accompanied by some wicked temptations. This obviously contradicts Hick's fundamental idea that behind a good act stand purely good intentions.

[6] To give an illustration, while some people find a contemplative life lived in seclusion and isolation admirable, others believe this to be useless. Hick himself mentions the possibility of saintly individuals living in hermitages (Hick 2006, 50). By contrast, Jalalu'l-Din Rumi, the famous poet and mystic, contests this idea. For Rumi, God wants us to be capable of temperance and self-restraint. This cannot take place if one is isolated from any possible temptation, because then one is secluded from all chances to prove virtue: "[W]hen there is no adversary, what avails thy courage?" (Rumi 2021, poem 33).

that humans are able to distinguish between moral wrong and right, and our inherent moral sense equips us with the appropriate means to distinguish between honourable and mischievous people from our outside perspective. In other words, Hick expects the *finis operis* to be aligned with the *finis operantis* in the same way that the fruits of a tree will be of the same kind as the tree that bore them.

3.2 Hick's Practical Considerations

Even though Hick has already justified his stance from an experiential point of view, he draws further support from the positive consequences of adopting his position in the context of faith. In fact, the benefits of recognizing and honouring saints are especially pronounced when looking at the world's most disadvantaged. They, in particular, are inspired by saintly characters to face their additional burdens (Hick 2006, 182). Nevertheless, confronting the challenges of life, and whatever comes after it, is certainly demanding for all of us. Going hand in hand with this inspiration are the positive practical consequences of the belief itself. The idea of the goodness of the Ultimate Reality has profound effects on our attitudes and perceptions of the world. This can be explained in the following way: while the physical world does not change simply because we start believing in something, the context, the bigger picture, does. Suddenly, we see the Ultimate Reality and how, for example, its goodness is undergirding the world. In order to achieve this reconceptualization of the world, one needs saints to exemplify how to focus one's spiritual efforts, and to be a living proof that this reorientation of the self is possible (190).

Hick then develops his ideas about the practical implications without addressing Clark's objection about the demotivating psychological effects of acknowledging that religious traditions other than one's own might have equally transformative power. In light of the fact that Hick allows for the idea of secular sainthood, it seems that he does not see the need to adhere to a specific religious tradition's framework but believes that the transformation can even take place within the bounds of secular categories.

Critical Remarks

The proposals above still face the problem of defining the criteria for qualifying as a saint or, even more importantly, the question: what actions count as good. Even though Hick gives examples of saints (Hick 2006, 51), it is impossible to determine the specific criteria he employs. The real-life example of St. Teresa of Calcutta (better known as Mother Teresa) illustrates vividly the extent that these disputes can reach. On the one hand, tens of thousands of pilgrims flocked to Rome to witness her canonization in 2016 (Bordoni 2020), and even outside of the Catholic context, she is widely used as a paradigmatic example of self-sacrifice and the epitome of charity (see e.g.: Ruse 1984, 172). On the other hand, there are several outspoken critics. These critics provide a completely different perspective on Mother Teresa's actions, emphasizing the moral defects of her methods and even her projects' overall aims. For example, according to workers' accounts compiled by Hitchens and Chatterjee, in one of Mother Teresa's projects, a house for the dying, the provision of medical care is reported to have been of secondary importance. Also, Mother Teresa did not intend to lift them out of poverty. Instead, austerity prevailed, and money was often prohibited from being spent on the poor (Chatterjee 2016, Chapter 9; Hitchens 1995, 46-7). Hitchens asserts that the poor were exploited: first, in order to evoke compassion, and second because, in Mother Teresa's eyes, those people's misery was positively contributing to the world by virtue of sharing their suffering with Christ (Hitchens 1995, 11).

Both Mother Teresa's supporters and critics justify their conclusions by listing her beneficial and, respectively, harmful actions. In other words, both parties justify their opinions according to the same idea Hick holds; namely, that the moral fruits manifested through actions in someone's life reflect the moral character of the actor. Clearly, there is more than one controversial point here. Not only is it controversial whether we can have a holistic and genuine picture of someone's transformation and closeness to God through great actions, but what actions are truly valuable is just as disputed. Meanwhile, Clark could not rule out the possibility that Mother Teresa's intentions were wicked, even if there had been no problems like the allegedly inhumane sanitary standards

and medical treatment, which strongly suggest a negative rather than neutral or eschewed interpretation of Mother Teresa's character.

On another note, those disagreeing with saints' critics might find themselves inclined to argue that the applied standards are too high. This objection will touch on the prominent consideration of the increasing difficulties of acting in a remarkably beneficent way, emphasizing the demanding circumstances of our contemporary world. Dennett addresses this in the following way. In essence, identifying globalization as its primary reason, Dennett underlines that the bar for what counts as remarkable devotion and self-sacrifice is higher than ever before. In the past, if a humanitarian crisis was geographically far away, helping was categorically out of reach, and most probably, we would not even know about it occurring. Nowadays, by contrast, technology has connected us to all "corners" of the world. Thus, the possibilities of what we can do and, simultaneously, of what we ought to do have multiplied (Dennett 2006, 293). Circumstances (also global ones) play different roles in Clark's and Hick's arguments. Clark sees the intention of the actor, *finis operantis*, as crucial for judging the moral quality of an act, simultaneously holding that *finis operis* reveals nothing about the intention of the actor, he concludes his argument without elaborating on the effect of circumstances on this evaluation. Since, if you do not know the kind of moral quality an act has, assessing the degree of that quality is pointless, if not impossible. By contrast, Hick presumably agrees with the significance commonly attributed to circumstances as leading modifiers of the degree to which a deed possesses a moral quality, even if he does not explicitly mention this.

Conclusion

The analysis of Clark's and Hick's positions equals a reconstruction of the dispute on the character of the epistemic relation between people. Revolving around religiously motivated metamorphoses but remaining closely linked to morality, the dispute can be extrapolated onto a more general context of evaluating people's moral character from their actions and questioning the legitimacy of moral authorities.

Neither of the philosophers seems to disagree with the fact that if someone is good, then they will act well. Yet, we can only see actions and need to infer whether the actor was motivated by good or vile

intentions. Clark argues that "a wicked person can appear just or righteous" (Clark 1997, 315). In other words, Clark's standpoint can be summarized in the following way: having good intentions leads to a perceived good outcome of one's actions; having vile intentions can also lead to a perceived good outcome of one's actions (but also to negative outcomes). Opposing Clark, Hick argues that "humans are ethical beings, able to distinguish between good and evil people" (Hick 2006, 211 [Footnote to p.149]).

However, fully implementing either of the two ideas into one's life does not seem morally desirable. Clark himself even points out that acknowledging other religious traditions as possibly equally successful at transforming their adherents (an idea he cannot logically rule out holding his agnostic position) deprives us of the motivation generated by the perception of one's own tradition as providing privileged access to the transformative powers of the Ultimate Reality (Clark 1997, 319). Hick, in turn, emphasizes that recognizing saints has a positive effect by inspiring others and giving hope to the disadvantaged (Hick 2006, 182). Nonetheless, we cannot dismiss the overruling strength of Clark's objection that, in reality, even vile people can sometimes display good or even exemplary behaviour merely in order to gain someone's trust and then exploit it. Therefore, adopting Hick's view without any reservations seems naïve.

To claim, as Hick does, that only clinical psychopaths are able to act well as a pretence (211 [Footnote to p. 149]) cannot possibly account for the frequency of such occurrences. Surely, Mother Teresa is a controversial, large-scale, and well-known example. But there are other, more general examples: children may take care of their elderly parents in order to receive a larger share of their inheritance; a professional may become CEO of an NGO for financial gain; and a classmate may pose as your friend solely to copy your homework. Decisively, one cannot know a person's moral character just by knowing a few of their deeds. On the other hand, the constant suspicion of others, if we were to adopt Clark's view, seems unbearable. Also, in many cases, righteous actions do genuinely reflect a person's character. Accordingly, maybe a person's accumulation of good acts (especially if under extraordinary circumstances) should indeed be regarded as increasing support for the belief in their genuine generosity. Even though our judgement can turn

out to be incorrect, in order to build up a genuine relationship with someone, may it be as a friend or spouse, there is no room for the distance that Clark's notions of "rational suspicion" or "reasonable doubt" would require.

Additionally, it is generally easier to conceal evil intentions for brief periods of time, such as during TV shows, interviews, or even at one's job, whereas people's true character is revealed during times of personal distress, anger, and grief. These are situations that only close friends and family members witness. Nonetheless, in my opinion, if there were someone with wicked motives who continuously and consistently behaves righteously, then despite their wickedness, we have arguably nothing to lose by praising them. Even though the good deeds are just a manifestation of this person's insane self-discipline and fear of ruining their reputation, they did not do anything wrong. Thus, other wicked people should take them as an example.

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