Studies

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Normative Ambiguity Facing Those Who Flee Death during Times of War and Pandemic and Who Eventually Return Home

Abstract

We dwell in a world of physical things. When it comes to the environments that we live in, we usually become oriented to the place, and eventually feel at home in it. Facing death during war and pandemic are times of extreme disorientation, and we sometimes exhibit an impulse to flee. It is no wonder that in those desperate times, some with means and ability consider fleeing to a safer place. But are we morally obliged to act in ways that would ask us to sacrifice our deepest personal commitments and projects for others to meet their commitments and projects? It is argued here that fleeing Bosnia and Herzegovina during wartime, like what happened in the 90s, and fleeing a city during a pandemic may be morally decent actions. However, it is also an issue of political decency and fractured friendships. In cases or war and pandemic, returning home to contribute to the well-being of those they left behind may be morally and politically decent, but the fractured friendships may contribute to normative ambiguity. Why would anyone trust them again and regard them as a loyal friend? Perhaps reestablishing those trusting friendships may require those who remained behind to do what is supererogatory, i.e., doing more than can reasonably be asked of them, which in this case amounts to forgiving those who fled and giving them a second chance by welcoming them back home.

Keywords

normative ambiguity, caring, decency, orientation, disorientation, fleeing, war, pandemic

"Everybody knows that pestilences have a way of recurring in the world; yet somehow we find it hard to believe in ones that crash down on our heads from a blue sky. There have been as many plagues as wars in history; yet always plagues and wars take people equally by surprise." (Camus 1991: 36–37)

"… there's no question of heroism in all this. It's a matter of common decency. That's an idea which may make some

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people smile, but the only means of fighting a plague is –
common decency."

"What do you mean by 'common decency'?" Rambert's
tone was grave.

"I don't know what it means for other people. But in my
case I know that it consists in doing my job [doing one's
duty]." (Camus 1991: 163)

"Our loyalties are important signs of the kinds of persons
we have chosen to become. They mark a kind of constancy
or steadfastness in our attachments to those other persons,
groups, institutions, or ideals with which we have deliber-
ately decided to associate ourselves." (Bennett 1993: 665)

I. Preliminary Considerations

Philosophers tend to understand their work as one of abstraction, occasionally
beginning with the messiness of the world that we live in, complete with wars,
pandemics, the fleeings from those tragic events and ending with something
that is barely recognizable and readable to those lacking in philosophical acu-
men, which is most human beings. "Intentional obscurantism"[1] even pene-
trates the domain that we thought we were most familiar with, the domain of
morality, which is now saturated with ethical theory that is both normative
and metaethical. Not only have the three dominant normative views of the
rightness and wrongness of actions undergone centuries of analysis, leading
to a multitude of objections and revisions, but much attention has also been
given to the many semantical, ontological, and epistemological issues that are
pertinent to morality. These are the "meta" issues that have captivated phi-
losophers as Allan Gibbard, Gilbert Harman and Simon Blackburn. Becoming
immersed in the intricacies of meta-analysis is not my intention, however.
Perhaps, in this regard, this essay is more against moral philosophy than with
it, more about speaking to the "visceralness" of moral experience than burying
it under intricate layers of esoteric theory.[2] This essay exemplifies what I call
integrative philosophy,[3] wherein the philosophical and the empirical fuels the
investigation of lived moral and social/political experiences, which in this
case are fleeing death during times of war and pandemic, followed by those
of returning home.[4] It is a work that occupies the interstice between moral
philosophy (how we should act towards one another – or how we should live)
and political philosophy (what kind of society we should live in), along with
its interdisciplinarity. To be more precise, following a discussion of what it
means to flee and be oriented in a place, the key threefold issues taken up here
are: first, how war or a pandemic can disorient us in the place where we reside
or travel through by making it difficult to "find our way," as well as to "feel
at home," thereby leading us to flee the scene; second, whether fleeing one's
home engulfed by war or one's neighborhood ravaged by pandemic can be a
morally and politically decent action; and, third, whether such fleeing, even
if in some ways decent, may lead to a normative conundrum. The contention
of this essay is that even when the fleeing and then returning associated with
dangerous situations are morally and politically decent, the return home may
be normatively murky when the web of relationships (including friendships)
is considered. The anger associated with the betrayal may be so great that
friendships may be beyond repair. They become broken! Shattered! Blasted!

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II. Fleeing

We often show an impulse to flee when we fear a perceived danger. For example, it is common for people to frantically search for a way out of a burning building even to the point of jumping through a window or to wildly run from a concert venue, occasionally trampling on the bodies of fellow concert goers, as the sniper claims one victim after another around them. It is only natural when a person perceives a life-threatening situation that a person will make every effort to flee.

In some instances, however, we have time to respond in a more deliberative manner, as evidenced by our rational and moral agency taking over. Quickly analyzing the situation, exploring our options – i.e., possible actions and their likely consequences – we choose the one that we believe to *matter* more than the others considered, and then act accordingly. Of course, things matter to me and others in different ways, but here I am only interested in how certain things matter to me and others because we *care* about these things (Parfit 2017: 41).[5] I agree with the American philosopher Larry Temkin when he writes that

"… we are animals for whom things matter. It matters to us whether we realize our life plans… It matters to us whether our loved ones flourish […]. The fact that such issues matter to us is not up for debate. They do." (Temkin 2016: 27)

Let us follow Temkin's lead and consider the realization of our life plans and the flourishing of our loved ones as the *matterings* that rise to the top. Surely, finding ourselves in a burning building or at the hands of a mugger could jeopardize those *matterings*. Consequently, people who find themselves in those situations may act in very deliberative ways in their attempt to flee. In the case of the burning building, for example, I might conclude that my chances of surviving a jump from a five-story window are almost nil, so I chose to move to the rooftop in the hope that firefighters now will have enough time to rescue

[1]
A focus on technical terminology and complex argument, rather than a meandering argumentative narrative set in the world of recognizable experiences.

[2]
I believe Lawrence Blum was spot on, in his *Moral Perception and Particularity*, when he wrote: "By and large, contemporary moral philosophy has not felt pressed to explore what it is like to be a person who lives according to its various normative theories, nor how one gets to be such a person." (Blum 1994: 183)

[3]
It reminds me of what some call "practical philosophy" (which is not limited to ethics), as an approach in which philosophical theorizing begins with practical problems and works towards solving them. Theories are the means to illuminate situations that people live in. I am less impressed with talk of solutions and favor different ways of understanding a problem, an issue, or a situation with a

particular non-philosophical goal or purpose in mind, e.g., democracy and peace building, rather than some abstraction.

[4]
Many thanks to William Melanson for showing me the breadth of instances that reflect the moral conundrums associated with fleeing and returning. Surely, the mass exodus caused by the war in Syria, the wealthy who can protect themselves in their vulnerable neighborhood from the effects of climate change, and partners in a broken marriage are three other prominent instances.

[5]
Things that we care about are those that are integrated into our lives (projects, interests, relationships, desires) and we have strong positive feelings towards them. When it comes to people who we care about, we have a relationship with them that we want to foster, and our feelings are positive, helpful, and nurturing. See also Diemut Bubeck's definition of caring (Bubeck 1995: fn. 15).

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me from the inferno. Or, in the case of being mugged, I might try to grab the assailant's gun. Or, I might attempt to reason with the mugger and persuade him to take something of lesser value. Clearly, we often have a number of possible ways of dealing with clear and present dangers. Regardless of how much we deliberate, we often just turn and run.

But does fleeing have anything to do with our being disoriented in a world of war or pandemic? Is fear of being harmed by violence or ravaged by a disease in some way connected to how we occupy and navigate through space (orientation), particularly a familiar place?

III. Orientation in Space

I am fascinated by the ways in which we human beings "find ourselves in" the physical, tangible day to day world, the world of things. Whether we are simply aware of ourselves as one among many things or we surround ourselves with some things and not others, things are near to us. As Martin Heidegger wrote in "The Thing," "near to us are what we usually call things" (Heidegger 1971b: 164). Things come in all shapes and sizes. When it comes to urban environments,[6] like cities and their neighborhoods, we come *face to face* with things like buildings, streets, signage, store fronts, markets, cars, buses and parks. And there are trees, birds, dogs and, we must not forget, other people. Such are the things that are near to us.

Things that surround us are at the core of what it means for a person to be oriented. Sara Ahmed's perceptive work *Queer Phenomenology. Orientations, Objects, Others* points us in the right direction. First, we are oriented if we continue to know where we are after moving away from our starting point (Ahmed 2006: 1). Another meaning of orientation is how we reside in space (who and what are with us) (Ahmed 2006: 2). I find this closely associated with the notion of familiarity (Ahmed 2006: 4–7), feeling at home or the Heideggerian notion of dwelling (Heidegger 1971a: 145–161). We often think of dwelling in very intimate terms of the building in which we reside. I feel at home physically, emotionally, and spiritually in my flat in a three story walk up in the Park East neighborhood of Omaha, Nebraska. From the art hanging on its walls, and the ceramics and wood carvings that adorn the tops of its many bookcases, these objects are positively evocative (special) for me, each being "wrapped in" certain meanings (often connected to fond memories) and they evoke the feelings of happiness and contentment in me. These objects have centripetal effects on me, which means that they draw me into that place, eliciting in me a feeling of being welcomed (Conces 2019: 107–119). These objects help me to become embedded in this place. It is not simply a being there, but it is more a being in a place (not just space), being at home. But it is also about where my building is situated, within the larger context of neighborhoods.

Neighborhoods can be diverse. As Margalit alerts us to the expansiveness of some conceptions of neighborhood, "for Kant, being on the same planet with other human beings is enough to make them neighbors" (Margalit 2019: 42). A far more typical sort of reading of "neighborhood" shrinks its spatial magnitude to reflect a certain shared lived intimacy. Neighborhoods vary in land and population size, ethnic/racial(/class) makeup, style of architecture and boundary type. Park East is relatively small and largely inhabited by those on the lower half of the socio-economic scale. There is poverty and homelessness,

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as well as robbery and murder. It is bounded and intersected by four main east-west throughfares. The word 'thoroughfare' is an apt word because most of those who use these streets are going elsewhere. The drivers have no intention of venturing down any of my neighborhood's side streets. But who could blame them? My neighborhood is peppered with houses in various states of disrepair, abandoned lots cluttered with an old couch or worn-out tires, buildings decorated with gang graffiti, and people living in makeshift tents on sidewalks (Conces 2018: 10). Park East does not exude idyllic neighborliness. It is not a place where people easily come to together and "understand each other through everyday encounters" (Sennett 2018: 125). Such encounters do occur, but the differences in many significant identities (e.g., being homeless, poor, black or brown) often prove too severe a barrier for deep meaningful interaction.

Even the physical layout and the social dynamic of this neighborhood with all its issues, manifests a certain degree of orientation in space for those who live here and those who travel through it. People are oriented towards and away or around parts of Part East. Disorientations do occur in cities and their neighborhoods, however. Enter war and pandemic.

IV. Disorientation in Space: Fleeing during War and Pandemic

But does fleeing have anything to do with our being disoriented in a world of war or pandemic? Generally speaking, what changes when we become disoriented during desperate times like these? Being disoriented means that the things that surround us no longer help us to keep our bearings; the familiar that once provided anchor points of safety no longer do so – even co-workers, neighbors and random persons on the street become potentially dangerous overnight. The intimacy of how we reside in space is lost. It is no longer clear with whom and with what we should reside. Our home and its neighborhood are under existential threat. Now, in some cases the menace lives across the hallway in the same building in which we reside. The problem is not that the neighborhood becomes unrecognizable. On the face of it, it looks the same. However, what has changed is the meaning and emotional valence of some of the things (evocative objects). Some things in the neighborhood that were safe have become potentially dangerous, resulting in the neighborhood now being thought of and felt as unsafe. It is difficult to feel at home in a place that is dangerous and that we fear. Interesting enough, there is a kind of dissonance – "we are alienated in the midst of the familiar."[7] The neighborhood has been severely compromised.

Let's consider, for instance, the war that took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 1990s. The conflict took many "people by surprise." Some woke up only to find their neighbor pointing a gun at them and forcing them to leave their home with only the clothes on their backs moments before their homes

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[6]
Steven Vogel, in *Thinking like a Mall* (2016), following Bill McKibben's *The End of Nature* (1989), makes a compelling case that we should abandon the concept of nature and simply use "environment" in its place, given that the built world is the only one that we inhabit. Although the references to environment are not dismissive of Vogel's collapsing of categories, the environment focused on in this essay is the urbanenvironment with its neighborhoods, littered with manufactured objects.

[7]
Per Bauhn, e-mail message to author, 26 December 2020.

were pillaged or confiscated, or even set on fire. The situation for many was far worse: beating, rape, torture, internment and death. Unfortunately, anticipating such mayhem did not occur to some; at best they were more apprehensive than usual, but not to the degree that would have led them to devise an escape plan. "It could never become that bad," they thought. So, they continued to sit idly by and were unprepared for the worst when it knocked on their door.

But some became so alarmed that they devised and implemented a getaway plan before the first shots rang out in Sarajevo in March of 1992. Some living in Sarajevo and elsewhere in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including university faculty, chose to flee the country to escape the carnage that they believed was imminent. They had decided to get as far away as possible. They fled to whatever country would receive them, including Norway and Sweden. A university professor with ample means and ability could persuade himself that life in Bergen or Malmö would be far better than in a Sarajevo under siege. A prudential decision-making procedure could provide rationale (or cover) to flee. Hence, the decision to pack up his family and head northward, especially at a time when it was much safer to travel and far more likely to be received. "Go now before the borders are closed!" This does not mean it was an easy decision to leave home, neighborhood, family and friends, schools and jobs for the uncertainty of a strange place and strange people. At least he had a viable choice to leave, which many did not have.[8]

Let's consider the second example, pandemic, specifically the COVID-19 pandemic of 2019–2022. The residents of urban centers were battling an invisible enemy which infiltrated their neighborhoods making living in close quarters with their neighbors a hazard. All daily routines that required navigating through neighborhoods that people were once oriented in were jeopardized. Using public transportation to attend classes at a university, walking to a nearby bodega or corner grocer, delicatessen, or café all became high risk ventures. Some living in New York City, who possessed the wherewithal, could flee the city and drive to a resort tucked away in a less populated area or to a secluded country house.

Having pondered this for some time, I find it difficult to be overly critical of such decisions to flee. Who wouldn't see this as a settled matter and pack up and flee if they could? The survival instinct is powerful in each of us. I cannot say that I would not have chosen to act in a similar way. But would it be normatively acceptable? Couldn't we call the fleer from a desperate situation (like war or pandemic) a decent person? Don't we all want a meaningful life and to be decent people? But no matter, it is a mistake to think that the fleer from a desperate situation is necessarily a decent person. Once we take seriously the fact that we share the world with others who are not all like-minded and that we are members of various polities (collectives in public space), it becomes clear that there are twin decencies to manage: moral and political decency. A conundrum (normative ambiguity) may arise when the twin decencies are in the presence of a person's relationships (including friendships). At this point we may question whether the fleer is a morally and politically decent person, as well as a loyal friend. This is especially true with the fleer's return, at which point there may be great animosity directed at them by those who stayed behind.

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V. The Twin Decencies and Normative Ambiguity in Desperate Times

When I teach moral philosophy to undergraduates, I often treat it on the one hand as an array of different normative decision-making procedures (applying a utilitarian number crunching system or determining the moral maxim of some particular act and figuring out what it would mean for that maxim to be universalizable) or as a determination of what it means to be a virtuous person. They are all ideals of one sort or another that are commonly regarded as being applicable to how we live our lives. Moral philosophy is something that is conceptually manageable in the abstract, but has become increasingly unattractive in its push for the exemplary life and thus not of much use when it comes to offering us guidance in becoming just morally decent. As Todd May sees it, either these theories ask too much of us (thus they fail to be empirically informed about what human beings can do and so are unrealistic) or that the problem "lies in us, in our own unwillingness to commit ourselves to [exemplary] lives" (May 2019: 11).[9] May rightly poses the following question:

> "Are we really obliged to act in accordance with a morality that would ask of us to sacrifice our deepest personal commitments and projects if these conflict with moral requirements, be they consequentialist, deontological, or virtue ethical?" (May 2019: 14)

Some may see this as a less weighty moral philosophy because it is far less demanding than we are accustomed to. May nudges us toward a way of thinking about moral philosophy that he believes to be far more realistic (i.e., rooted in how human beings tend to operate) and, as a consequence, is a more *desirable* moral philosophy by offering us guidance that incorporates *reachable* goals all in the name of decency. It acknowledges the importance of being members of collectives while not losing sight of the importance of our own projects and goals – he articulates what it means to be a morally decent person, a goal that he believes to be desirable and reachable and, thus, I believe to be useful. Most of us neither regard ourselves as moral monsters (who are evil and not just bad (Haybron 2002)) nor as moral saints (sacrificial lambs), but being decent persons, which is more desirable than being a moral monster and surely more achievable than moral sainthood. Even though as May puts it, "we have [only] some or less inchoate sense of how [decency] might go" (May 2019: 3).

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[8]
We can turn to David Hume, the Scottish Enlightenment philosopher, who long before the War in Bosnia and Herzegovina wrote of the predicament that many face in not being able to extricate themselves from a situation: "Can we seriously say, that a poor peasant or artizan has a free choice to leave his country, when he knows no foreign language or manners, and lives from day to day by the small wages he acquires?" (Hume 1758/1985: 475) This passage remains applicable to many living in the Twenty-First Century. Fleeing a desperate situation for some is not a viable option. There are so many obstacles that make fleeing too challenging an undertaking, including transportation costs, pandemic lockdowns, personal security concerns, managing health issues, and moving children and the elderly. Yet, millions of people make informed, calculated decisions to risk their lives and the lives of their families as refugees in seeking asylum, sanctuary or refuge (Parekh 2020; Owen 2020).

[9]
Also dealing with this neglected issue, see Irvin, who writes: "A moral view that aspires to practical success must take into account what human beings are really like and how they are really motivated." (Irvin 2010: 373) "Moral ideals which demand that we abandon our current life structure typically have very little motivational force." (Irvin 2010: 375) I greatly appreciate Irvin's arguing for the importance of the aesthetic experience for the moral experience.

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For May, the moral core of decency is the acknowledgment that there are others in the world who have lives to live (May 2019: 3, 29). These lives are revealed to us through "the role of the face of others" (May 2019: 43).[10] The presence of others (in the visceralness of the face-to-face encounter) allows for the possibility of decency because decency involves aiding others, which means contributing to the others' ability to live meaningful lives.[11] May is very explicit about what it means

"… to lead a human life: it is to engage in projects and relationships that unfold over time; to be aware of one's death in a way that affects how one sees the arc of one's own life; to have biological needs like food, shelter, and sleep; to have basic psychological needs like care and a sense of attachment to one's surroundings." (May 2019: 40)

Surely it is not by accident that such a contribution is made. Perhaps what is intended here is simply a matter of amelioration – making the world a little more welcoming and kinder place for someone. As such, decency does not commit one to sainthood.[12] There are limits when it comes to aiding others, for "to ask that I sacrifice things that make my life meaningful in order to assist others in their quest for a meaningful life[13] is actually to treat my life as *less* worthy than theirs […] the importance of what makes life meaningful gives me permission to limit my aid to others" with whom we share the world (May 2019: 14).[14]

May recognizes that moral philosophy, which focuses on how people should act towards one another, does not exist in isolation from the fact that people live in numerous polities. Here he redirects the decency question to what might decency involve within these polities? (May 2019: 138). With the arrival of the political, we do not just acknowledge that there are others in the world who have lives to live, but that we *share* the world with others who are trying to create lives that are worth living within various polities. We may *share* a world but we all do not have the same vision of that *shared* world. It is those differences that at times lead to an acrimonious political landscape. Consequently, the tasks of political decency include behaving in a politically civil manner.[15] But civility is not sufficient, it needs to be followed by the use of good arguments to navigate through disagreements. Following Mill's lead on epistemic humility and fallibility (Mill 1895/1976: 19–64), May also recognizes that none of us possess a strangle hold on the truth or the correct vision of the *shared* world. But May acknowledges there are limits to which visions are acceptable. Acceptable visions must preserve human dignity which stems from human beings possessing the "intrinsic value of the capacity to engage projects and so on" (May 2019: 15). Great latitude is given to people to create their own visions. Nevertheless, there are limits. Visions that oppress, like those that are racist, homophobic, misogynistic or genocidal, are unacceptable and don't have much to do with political decency and the preservation of human dignity.[16]

Neighborhood living involves the building of personal relationships with those with whom we share the world, as well as polity memberships beyond the neighborhood (e.g., being a resident of a city, county, state, province or entity and perhaps citizen of that country) with their demands of political decency, in addition to demands of moral decency. How does all this unfold in desperate times? First, "the role of the face" plays an important part in building personal relationships, as well as allowing for the possibility of moral decency as was noted earlier. So, for someone who is considering fleeing New York City, she could be a morally decent person by staying put and

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continuing to provide aid as a regular customer at neighborhood businesses. It is initially and perhaps principally an economic relationship – the care that she provides in the form of a source of income that directly supports the owners, employees and their families. The care also extends outward to others, many of whom are strangers who she may never notice or ever see, but who also live in the neighborhood and who rely on the same businesses for various necessities. The value of the businesses for those who live in the neighborhood is incalculable (as a source of consumer goods, as well as an important social hub).

However, she is a member of polities as well, so political decency enters into the discussion. What might political decency look like in this situation? Perhaps staying put and promoting civility, the use of a good argument and role modeling help convince those who do not accept masking and social distancing to get on board with the program. Staying put and engaging people in the neighborhood could have a positive contagion effect.[17] On the other hand, her leaving might send a very different signal – one that results in other neighbors fleeing to safer places.[18] The loss of increasing numbers of regular customers to the businesses could eventually lead to mass closure, having a profound impact on the lives of those who rely on those businesses.

10
Others have made much of the face of others, for example, Emmanuel Levinas (Levinas 1985). However, for Levinas, the face-to-face encounter creates an asymmetry toward the other, giving the other a priority (Levinas 1969). For May, there is no such asymmetry, hence personal sacrifice is not without limit.

11
Johan Brännmark takes the notion of decent person as an aretaic one and understands it as a character type "defined as being nonvicious" (Brännmark 2006: 595). Being decent and coming to the aid of someone surely entails much more than simply being nonvicious.

12
Even though moral decency does not require a person to give up their life, a person may enter into an agreement that confers an obligation that may lead to such an outcome.

13
We all do not have the same ideas about what makes life meaningful, as well as about the kinds of sacrifices that we find acceptable. In the cases that have been noted, the ultimate sacrifice has been the one discussed. But many lesser sacrifices could be selected, which could make our lives less worthy than others. Deciding not to attend college or volunteering to become the next chairperson of a small academic department at a university could both be huge sacrifices for some people that would lead them to think of their lives as being less valuable than those of others. But these are not life or death decisions. Surely, giving up a convenience to save a life would be a morally laudable act.

14
Interestingly enough, on Shelly Kagan's view of commonsense morality, this is exactly one of the two options (i.e., limits to what morality can demand of us) (Kagan 1989: 1–2), so moral decency looks like amelioration with moderate sacrifice.

15
Political decency is far removed from what Eric Beerbohm refers to as the process of partisan politics: "[P]artisan talk is uncivil, unwavering, and liable to reject opponents through *ad hominems* instead of reasons." (Beerbohm 2019: 136)

16
Mill is a strong advocate of allowing for "different experiments of living: that free scope should be given to varieties of character, short of injury to others […]" (Mill 1895/1976: 68).

17
Engaging people can take many forms including art installation, along the lines of the work of the contemporary Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei.

18
May acknowledges the possibility of a positive contagious effect from acts of common decency through a recipient of a kind act paying it forward or by someone witnessing the decency of someone which encourages them to act in a similar way. Ísold Uggadóttir's film *And Breathe Normally* (2018) has a storyline dedicated to the decency of strangers, though it is also about fleeing. Unfortunately, fleeing might send a very different sort of message to the detriment of many.

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Nevertheless, given that a morally decent person is not committed to sacrificing themselves to maintain a neighbor's business and that it is unclear what the weightiness of political decency would be in this case, then fleeing may not jeopardize the human dignity of her neighbors in clear and obvious ways. For sure, the inevitability that fleeing will jeopardize people's lives is at best fuzzy. Even contracting COVID-19 is not inevitable. It appears that it is possible for her to be both a morally and politically decent person *qua* fleer.

The situation of those, like university faculty in Bosnia and Herzegovina, who were facing the possibility of war in their country and who began to consider fleeing their city and country for safety and prosperity elsewhere is also filled with much uncertainty. In the days and weeks leading up to wars, there are often a bunch of fuzzy possibilities, sometimes including whether there would even be a war and who the enemy would be (whether neighbors would turn on each other – but then the War in Bosnia and Herzegovina began; neighbor did turn on neighbor). Like most people, university faculty have various relationships with others, including colleagues and students, café and grocery store owners, friends, and extended family members. Then, there are also all the relationships that family members have with others – it is a web of relationships. Let us not forget that they are citizens of a country. Surely as a citizen, one has a duty to participate in the collective defense of the country and its duly elected government. To flee from the war and their obligation to defend the country would be quite deplorable. Fleeing the city at that point would be remembered by many for a long time and could be used against the family if they returned. There is also the possibility of a negative contagion effect, one that deals with "large numbers of apparently insignificant actions [in this case, people fleeing the city] having a joint, cumulative impact" (Attfeld 2009: 227). Of course, in war, the impacts of fleeing are also less than certain – whether a contagion effect would even be probable, given that fleeing the city was beyond the means of many residents of the city and fleeing became exceedingly difficult as the siege intensified. But if there were such a negative contagion effect, i.e., more and more people leaving for safer lands, thus resulting in fewer people remaining to defend the city and by extension the country – the cumulative impact of a professor (and his family) fleeing war *could* have a much greater adverse impact than someone fleeing New York City during a pandemic. War appears to be a more difficult situation to politically extricate oneself from than a pandemic, because of defense demands of citizenship, which are folded into political decency.[19] It appears that moral decency could be achieved, but political decency lost.

VI. Normative Ambiguity in Returning Home

It is often the case that those who flee do so temporarily. They never intended to make a permanent move from their neighborhood.[20] Someone facing a pandemic is likely to have planned to return home when the situation improved, as indicated in published statistics by health authorities. The return home would be a momentous event for the fleer. But she might be under the impression that life will return to how it was before. It will be a simple matter of reoccupying her flat, getting back into her routines and her neighbors will welcome her back with open arms. Given how moral decency has been defined, she is reentering the community as a decent person, who will once again contribute to the ability of business owners (and others in the

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neighborhood) to live a meaningful life. Being politically decent may also apply to the return as noted earlier. However, the welcoming party may be not present or it may not include the various business owners, depending on how fractured her relationships are with her neighbors. This would make the situation normatively murky.

The subject of friendship has been substantively tackled by a few philosophers – Aristotle is one of them. He dedicated Books VIII and IX of the *Nichomachean Ethics* to the topic. His contribution includes divisions between different types of friendship. The lowest level of friendship is the friendship of utility (Aristotle: 1155b3–5). This type is defined by "mutual advantage" (Svendsen 2017: 74). It should be mentioned that friendships include loyalty and trust, i.e., the friend is perceived as steadfast, reliable and supportive in some important ways. We typically do not trust strangers, because there is no basis to believe they are reliable and are supportive of our lives. As Virginia Held reminds us, "trust is built, bit by bit, largely by practices of caring" (Held 2005: 42). Caring practices amount to doing something good for someone (they involve "work and the expenditure of energy on the part of the person doing the caring" (Svendsen 2017: 74)). On the one hand, the utility base of some friendships makes them relatively easy to initially form, on the other hand, it makes them easily collapsible.

"Trust is fragile and can be shattered in a single event, to *rebuild* it may take long stretches of time and many expressions of care, or the *rebuilding* may be impossible." (Held 2005: 42)

As Svendsen notes, "the advantage on which the friendship is based can change due to shifts in life circumstances" (Svendsen 2017: 74). If we understand the friendship between the woman and the various business owners as friendships of utility, then they were tenuous from the start. It was a mutually advantageous one for each party as long as the neighborhood was easy to navigate with limited risk. The woman had a place close by to purchase various necessities and the owners acquired a stream of income. With the onset of the pandemic and the fear associated with it, the situation changed dramatically resulting in the collapse of their friendships, with the loss of loyalty and the severance of trust.

When it comes to friendship, surely friendships of utility often develop into something that is beyond economics. Regular customers over time get to know the families and close friends of business owners and they begin to care for each other's well-being. This would represent Aristotle's deeper type of friendship (Aristotle: 1156b1–12). As Svendsen makes us aware, we care about friends.

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I do not rule out the possibility that demands of citizenship may apply to those who are considering fleeing a pandemic.

20

With the worsening effects of climate change making some large cities like New York, London and Shanghai more vulnerable, those who have means and ability have begun to wield their wealth to literally relocate to higher ground, sometimes within the same neighborhood (fleeing might amount to moving just a few blocks down the street), into what can only be called fortified structures with filtered air and an emergency power source, along with all the amenities of modern life – grocery stores, cafés, retail stores and gym facilities – all there in the event of an intense storm or the air pollution becomes too high during a hot summer day. Wealth offers them access to the best of both worlds – they can rub shoulders with their former neighbors and have the option to live a cloistered life if the situation dictates it. Another way in which class rears its ugly head in the Twenty-First Century.

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"Caring[21] about someone gives the world [some of] its meaning." (Svendsen 2017: 90)

Friendships presuppose an identity – a shared identity – there is an ʻusʼ (Svendsen 2017: 91).

The return of the professor (and his family) may be morally decent, contributing to many people living a meaningful life – including students, colleagues, staff, neighbors and politically decent – insofar as the return is likely to help restore the integrity of the university, thereby contributing to the rebuilding of the country. The same could hold true for the person returning to a pandemic ravaged neighborhood. The returnee could help reinvigorate the customer base of many shops, restaurants and cafes – establishments that were financially devastated by the pandemic. The return could also be politically decent through the returnee's show of support for local health safety measures like masking and social distancing in the neighborhood that could contribute to the well-being of others. In both situations, it seems that a strong case could be made for a morally and politically decent return, yet they could still be normatively murky.

It would be hasty to be satisfied with this answer because friendships have yet to be considered in the context of the return. We may think that the case for moral decency becomes even stronger, since the rekindling of past relationships would contribute to meaningful life. But even this way of thinking is dubious because it makes short shrift of trust and loyalty that are so crucial to friendships. In the desperate situation of the War in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the university professor *qua* fleer left people behind in Sarajevo during its 1415-day siege. Those who stayed put struggled through sub-standard housing, food and medical care shortages, relentless sniping, mortar and artillery fire from the surrounding hills, the witnessing of the suffering and death of friends, family and neighbors. In the case of the pandemic, those who stayed behind faced constant death, social isolation, financial ruin and witnessed the suffering and death of many in their neighborhood.

Surely, some of them recall memories of these past events and their past emotions of anger and envy (episodic memories) (Margalit 2002: 107). As Margalit insightfully notes, "the price of such memory can be high. It can poison our relationship with" (Margalit 2002: 110) those who fled and who want to return. This should come as no surprise. I can readily imagine people in a crowd whispering or even shouting: "How dare you show your face in our neighborhood! You are not one of us!" Leaving friends, colleagues and neighbors behind to fend for themselves during the war, the fleers became *personae non gratae*. Recalling Margalit, the price of this continuing animosity can be quite high: some professors who wanted to return to academic positions in Sarajevo were punished by not being allowed reentry into academic life. They were not wanted. And some now want to charge a settlement tax on those who "abandoned" their New York City neighborhoods during the pandemic for refuge in a safer place. On the one hand, the returnees could be understood as morally and politically decent. On the other hand, they betrayed friends and that is not easily forgotten. These situations have become normatively murky.

VI. Conclusion: Where Do We Go from Here?

Is there a way around this moral conundrum (normative ambiguity) that involves a morally and politically decent person, yet one who is also normatively

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suspect of being disloyal and untrustworthy, thus betraying what it means to be a friend in whatever context? Given that loyalty and trustworthiness are built on multiple personal interactions (primarily through face-to-face encounters), interactions will not be forthcoming if the fleers are not given an opportunity to rebuild those bonds of loyalty and trust by being relocated back into the neighborhood as a customer *qua* friend, colleague *qua* friend, neighbor *qua* friend again. Some say that it will take a certain amount of *literal forgetfulness* on the part of those who stayed behind (through progressively forgetting over time, the suppression or even repression of memories). That is a tall order, something that surely cannot be demanded of them even if possible.[22] It has been argued elsewhere (Conces 2009: 31–41) that sometimes *moral forgetfulness* has a role to play in resolving conflict, i.e., a temporary hiatus in discussing a problem and waiting for a better time to discuss it when cooler heads can prevail. In the final analysis, such a hiatus may require those who stayed behind to perform a supererogatory act, i.e., "doing more than can reasonably be asked of [them]" (Brännmark 2006: 593) – like forgiving those who fled and giving them a second chance. However, many people who have survived such situations find it impossible to make peace and to forgive those who they perceive as having hurt them terribly. For them, trust, care and friendship may never be rekindled. I recognize that this essay may not nudge anyone to forgive, but as the American poet Ella Wheeler Wilcox wrote in "Protest" (1914):

"To sin by silence when we should protest, makes cowards out of men."

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21
Diemut Bubeck offers a substantive definition of caring: "Caring for is the meeting of the needs of one person by another person, where face-to-face interaction between carer and cared-for is a crucial element of the overall activity and where the need is of such a nature that it cannot possibly be met by the person in need herself." (Bubeck 1995: 129)

22
I am in agreement with Avishai Margalit (Margalit 2002: 201) who argues that we simply cannot intentionally forget something.

Those who remained behind in New York City, who witnessed illness and death or who survived the siege of Sarajevo cannot simply forget those experiences. There are too many triggers that will lead them to remember those horrific events. Once they remember, they cannot at that moment will them away. They could distract themselves, attend to other affairs or engage in willful ignorance, i.e., not pursuing a deeper understanding of events. None of these are cases in which a memory is forgotten.

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Rory J. Conces

Normativna dvojakost s kojom se susreću oni koji bježe od smrti tijekom rata i pandemije i koji se u konačnici vrate domovima

Sažetak

Obitavamo u svijetu fizičkih stvari. Kada je u pitanju okoliš u kojemu živimo, postepeno se prema njemu počnemo orijentirati i u konačnici se u njemu osjećamo kao doma. Suočavanje sa smrću tijekom rata i pandemije vremena su iznimne dezorijentiranosti i ponekad pokazujemo implus za bijegom. Ne čudi da u tim očajnim vremenima neki koji imaju sredstava i mogućnosti razmišljaju o bijegu na sigurnije mjesto. Ali jesmo li moralno obvezni djelovati na načine koji bi od nas zahtijevali žrtvovanje svojih najdubljih osobnih obveza i projekata da bi drugi ispunili svoje obveze i projekte? Ovdje se tvrdi da bijeg iz Bosne i Hercegovine za vrijeme rata, kao što se dogodilo 1990-ih, i bijeg iz grada za vrijeme pandemije mogu biti moralno pošteni postupci. Međutim, to je također pitanje političke poštenosti i razlomljenih prijateljstava. U slučajevima rata i pandemije, povratak domu da bi se doprinijelo dobrobiti onih koje su ostavili može biti moralno i politički pošteno, ali razlomljena prijateljstva mogu pridonijeti normativnoj dvosmislenosti. Zašto bi im netko ponovno vjerovao i smatrao ih odanim prijateljem? Možda bi ponovno uspostavljanje tih prijateljstava od povjerenja moglo zahtijevati od onih koji su ostali da učine ono što je pretjerano, tj. da učine više nego što se od njih razumno može tražiti, što se u ovom slučaju svodi na opraštanje onima koji su pobjegli i davanje druge prilike tako što će doma biti dobrodošli.

Ključne riječi

normativna dvosmislenost, briga, poštenost, orijentacija, dezorijentacija, bježanje, rat, pandemija

Rory J. Conces

Normative Doppeldeutigkeit gegenüber denen, die in Zeiten von Krieg und Pandemie vor dem Tod fliehen und letztendlich nach Hause zurückkehren

Zusammenfassung

Wir weilen in einer Welt der physischen Dinge. Wenn es um die Umgebung geht, in der wir leben, orientieren wir uns üblicherweise an dem Ort und fühlen uns da letztlich zu Hause. Die Konfrontation mit dem Tod während Krieg und Pandemie steht für Zeiten extremer Orientierungslosigkeit, sodass wir gelegentlich einen Fluchtimpuls zeigen. Es ist kein Wunder, dass in diesen verzweifelten Zeiten einige mit Mitteln und Möglichkeiten in Erwägung ziehen, an einen sichereren Ort zu fliehen. Aber sind wir moralisch verpflichtet, auf jene Weise zu handeln, die von uns verlangen würde, unsere tiefsten persönlichen Verpflichtungen und Projekte zu opfern, damit andere ihren Verpflichtungen und Projekten nachkommen können? Hier wird argumentiert, dass die Flucht aus Bosnien und Herzegowina während der Kriegszeit, wie es in den 90er-Jahren geschah, und die Flucht aus einer Stadt während einer Pandemie moralisch anständige Handlungen sein können. Es ist gleichwohl auch eine Frage des politischen Anstands und der zerbrochenen Freundschaften. In Fällen von Krieg und Pandemie mag es moralisch und politisch schicklich sein, nach Hause zurückzukehren, um zum Wohlergehen derer beizusteuern, die man zurückließ, jedoch können die zerbrochenen Freundschaften zu normativer Doppelsinnigkeit beitragen. Warum sollte jemand ihnen wieder vertrauen und sie als treuen Freund erachten? Womöglich mag die Wiederherstellung dieser vertrauensvollen

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Freundschaften von den Zurückgebliebenen verlangen, das Supererogatorische zu tun, d. h. mehr zu tun, als vernünftigerweise von ihnen gefordert werden kann, was diesfalls darauf hinausläuft, denen zu vergeben, die geflohen sind, und ihnen eine zweite Chance zu geben, indem man sie zu Hause willkommen heißt.

Schlüsselwörter

normative Doppeldeutigkeit, Fürsorge, Anstand, Orientierung, Desorientierung, Flucht, Krieg, Pandemie

Rory J. Conces

L'ambiguïté normative à laquelle font face ceux qui fuient la mort en temps de guerre et de pandémie et qui éventuellement regagnent leur foyer

Résumé

Nous demeurons dans un monde de choses physiques. Lorsqu'il est question de l'environnement au sein duquel nous vivons, nous nous orientons habituellement vers cet espace et nous sentons chez nous. La confrontation avec la mort durant la guerre et la pandémie représentent des temps d'extrême désorientation et nous exprimons parfois une envie de fuir. Il n'est pas étonnant qu'en situation désespérée ceux qui ont les moyens et la possibilité considèrent la fuite comme un endroit plus sûr. Pourtant, ne sommes-nous pas moralement tenus d'agir de manière à sacrifier nos engagements personnels intimes et nos projets afin que d'autres remplissent leurs engagements et réalisent leurs projets ? J'affirme ici que fuir la Bosnie Herzégovine en temps de guerre, comme ce qui s'est passé dans les années '90, ainsi que fuir la ville en temps de pandémie, peuvent être considérées comme des actions moralement acceptables. Cependant, il s'agit également d'une question qui touche à la loyauté politique et aux amitiés compromises. En situation de guerre et de pandémie, rentrer chez soi pour contribuer au bien-être de ceux qui ont été quittés peut être moralement et politiquement loyal, bien que les amitiés compromises peuvent nourrir l'ambiguïté normative. Pourquoi leur ferions-nous confiance et les considérerions-nous comme des amis loyaux ? Peut-être que ceux qui sont restés pourrait être appelés à rétablir ces relations de confiance et faire ce qui est surérogatoire, à savoir davantage que ce que nous pourrions raisonnablement attendre d'eux, ce qui, dans ce cas, signifie pardonner à ceux qui ont fui et leur donner une seconde chance en les accueillant chaleureusement.

Mots-clés

ambiguïté normative, bienveillance, loyauté, orientation, désorientation, fuite, guerre, pandémie