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# Re-conceptualizing Neurosis as a Degree of Egocentricity: Ethical Issues in Psychological Theory

M. Alvarez-Segura · M. F. Echavarria · P. C. Vitz

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**Abstract** Psychology's historical rejection of ethics has led to an oversimplification of the origins and treatments of mental disorders. In this article, we present an analysis of how classical neurosis can be reformulated from an ethical and psychological interaction. We focus on the crucial role that egocentricity plays and argue that this term can help to clarify how ego defensive ethical decisions can undermine psychological capacities and contribute to a progressive depersonalization that can result in typical clinical disorders. In Christian anthropology, the virtues, especially humility and love have a crucial role in the positive growth of human affective and cognitive capacities. In addition, the person in his/her nature is endowed with the capacity to transcend the self and to escape egocentricity through self-giving love of God and of others. This capacity of self-giving is diametrically opposed to egocentricity and opens a new way for possible psychological recovery.

**Keywords** Neurosis · Ethics · Egocentricity · Virtues · Self-giving

## Introduction

The separation between empirical and rational psychology of the nineteenth century paved the way for the increasing mutual rejection between psychology and ethics. Ethics has tended to become repressive of personal experience and subjectivity, instead of being the promoter of its development, and psychology has become an isolated science of human behavior, based only on what can be quantified (Rielo 2001; Echavarria 2008). As Erich Fromm (1947) declared: "Psychoanalysis in an attempt to establish psychology as a natural

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science, made the mistake of divorcing psychology from problems of philosophy and ethics. It ignored the fact that human personality cannot be understood unless we look at man in his totality” (6–7).

Increasingly psychology has dedicated its efforts to the pursuit of independence and progress and adopted the methodology of natural science while deeming problems that could not be tested as unimportant and irrelevant. This rupture between both disciplines and the rejection of the transcendental nature of this relation has brought on the idea that character itself is merely the product of environmental forces, the result of either biological or social conditions. It then made an oversimplification of disease and mental health. As a consequence, it has devalued human beings and, more significantly, their capacities for recovery. It has allowed them to ignore the value-laden and spiritual aspects of personal character. Until now, the standard approach to ethics in mental health has focused almost exclusively on the therapist, but little attention has been paid to how ethics relates to the patient in the process of developing or recovering from a disorder.

In spite of this opposition, several psychologists and psychiatrists have made an effort to apply the findings of both disciplines to the understanding of mental pathologies. Igor Caruso (1954) expressed it very clearly: “neurosis is impossible to resolve unless based on metaphysical-moral presuppositions” (87). Allers (1990) even earlier stated: “I have never yet come across a case of neurosis which did not eventually reveal, as the ultimate conflict and problem, an unsolved metaphysical problem” (158).

In more recent years, there has also been some controversial discussion about the clinical or ethical nature of mental disorders, especially personality disorders. The “dichotomous” thinking with regard to their possible origin has been overcome with the recognition that these two conditions overlap and influence each other (Zachar and Potter 2010). The question that arises now is the degree to which one condition influences the other and therefore molds personality. A “psycho-ethical” approach would allow the study of the complex mutual interaction of both disciplines (Rielo 2001; Echavarría 2005). On the basis of their clinical experience, several psychologists and psychiatrists have presented an interesting and insightful analysis of how neurotic disorders can be reformulated from the perspective of an ethical and psychological interaction. For us, ethics is not only concerned with issues of right and wrong and with the nature of moral obligation, but also with the consequences of what a person cares about. These human values can be thought of as that with which the person guides him or herself in what they do with their life (Frankfurt 1988).

### **Definition of Egocentricity**

The origin of the term “egocentricity” lies in Alfred Adler’s theory of neurosis (1912), developed at the beginning of the last century. Since then it has been conceptualized in several ways, but in all of them can be found the idea described by the German psychiatrist, Fritz Kunkel, that the patient very commonly thinks, feels and acts exclusively in the service of the preservation or elevation only of his/her own ego (Kunkel 1984). He claimed that when consciousness was dominated by an ego-image (the idealized image that we create about ourselves), the behavior pattern and decisions become “egocentric” because they serve the ego exclusively. Under this egocentric attitude, the moral ability to appreciate values is impaired because the self-protective goal is paramount. This impairment has been described in detail by the philosopher Dietrich Von Hildebrand (2006). He argued that when a person’s fundamental attitudes are based exclusively on personal

interest, this leads to progressive value blindness. This value blindness arises because the person is so ego centered that he or she is unable to grasp the inherent beauty and nobility of objective values, especially those of other persons. This then has tragic consequences in relationships, as it impairs the ability to give of one's being and to share a life with others. Finally, this egocentric trend can invade the whole self by suffocating higher tendencies such as the virtues. It reduces one's vitality by making self-acceptance and genuine self-knowledge (humility) almost impossible. One loses perspective on and is blinded by a narrow preoccupation with one's own problems (Swanton 2003). Pieper (2010) perceived the consequences that egocentricity may have for mental disorders: "... modern psychiatry... points out how a man that cannot notice anything else than himself because he only looks at himself, has not only lost the possibility of being fair, he has also lost the health of the soul. A whole category of soul diseases lies in this egocentric lack of objectivity" (15).

We propose that egocentricity properly understood can help to clarify how ethical decisions and attitudes can undermine psychological capacities and contribute, to a greater or lesser degree, to a progressive depersonalization which can crystallize in typical clinical disorders. It applies then to the complex interaction between ethics and psychology.

### **Contributions of Major Theorists**

In this section, we will look in detail at the theory of neurosis that some authors have proposed. They were the first to emphasize or to continue emphasizing the crucial role that egocentricity plays in many psychological disorders—especially in neurosis—and thus provide a framework to understand the proposed egocentric interpretation of neurosis. The principle authors are Alfred Adler and his disciples, Rudolf Allers, Karen Horney, Igor Caruso, and more recently Martin Echavarria and Paul Vitz.

#### **Alfred Adler: The Guiding Principle**

Adler was the first to describe the connection between an attitude and a clinical condition. He understood neurosis as one of the possible results of the development of a human being under egocentric rule (Oberst and Stewart 2003). Neurosis is then a constructive creation of the psyche built upon the foundation of inferiority feelings. To compensate for these uncertainties or inferiority feelings, a guiding principle, a model or a fictitious life plan is built (Adler 1912). This fiction acquires a strong influence and draws all the psychic forces in its direction for the purpose of guaranteeing security. In consequence, human thought, feeling and volition adjust to this guiding principle. Not only thoughts and volition but also attention are affected, because the reinforcement of the neurotic fiction causes attention to concentrate on those points of view the neurotic regards as important, resulting in a narrowed field of vision.

Adler introduced his now well known concept of "social interest" (*Gemeinschaftsgefühl*) as a central factor in overcoming neurosis. Moving outward to others was necessary for psychological health. If this did not happen, Adler pointed out the capacity of the neurotic character to change "reality" in order to accommodate the egocentric ideal. If feelings of uncertainty increase, the neurotic predispositions and symptoms come into play. This compensation is then manifested in various symptoms and attitudes and becomes a psychological refuge. Adler was the first to link the lack of recognition of unacceptable feelings with pride. This was a crucial and novel idea that would be developed later by

Karen Horney. We can recognize Adler as the first major theorist of personality in which an ethical attitude, that is, the egocentric position brings about much psychological impairment.

### **Rudolf Allers: Exclusion of the Outside World**

Following Adler's theory, Rudolf Allers defined egocentricity as an essential component of the neurotic character. He added a very particular consequence regarding perception, namely that the vision of life is severely restricted by this tendency to concentrate on the self (Allers 1990): "The neurotic is like a man gazing into a small hand-mirror which, reflects his own features, but excludes the outside world" (164). The main and inevitable result of this self-focus is the exclusion of the rest of the world. Allers reasserted that fear and rebellion are essential elements in all forms of neurosis. Neurosis is conceptualized as the result of the tension set up between the will for power and control when confronted by those situations that give rise to a sense of powerlessness and uncertainty. The result is fear often intense even if sometime unconscious. Rebellion accompanies fear as the second characteristic, and he gave a theological meaning to this rebellion based on the biblical Fall (Allers 1931): "This rebellion is directed against the unchangeable facts of existence and of the rule of law in the universe, against man's inevitable limitations as a creature, against the supremacy of nature and other fellow-men, against existing law and custom and civilization and finally against the overshadowing greatness of God" (322).

The neurotic person is incapable, then, of accepting any limitation against the will or the power of his/her ego. The universal human need to defend the ego, to at least some extent, means that every person is thus a potential neurotic. One crucial aspect of the suffering of the neurotic person which Allers highlighted was the use he or she made of this suffering. It is often used as a convincing excuse for evading obligations or for increasing a subjective sense of entitlement or achievement.

Finally, this attitude toward existence leads to an artificial character. It is based on the fact that the neurotic under egocentric rule never surrenders the self entirely to what he or she is doing and as a consequence any feeling of genuine gratitude is impossible. Their behaviors always hide secondary considerations regarding the impression they are making on others. However, Allers explained that under particular circumstances the egocentric attitude of elevating one's own ego can be overcome with a humble and generous attitude where ego strength or competency can then be devoted to other obligations of life (Allers 1931): "The only person who can be entirely free from neurosis is the man whose life is spent in genuine devotion to the natural and supernatural obligations of life; and they are the saints" (326).

This capacity to begin to recognize one's own limitations is the first step to overcoming this egocentric embeddedness and is explained by Horney.

### **Karen Horney: The Pride System and Neurosis Development**

Horney (1950) in her book "Neurosis and human growth" described the neurotic process as a special form of human development which involves a waste of constructive energies. To satisfy all the inner needs that have arisen in an individual at a given time, the neurotic sets the imagination to work and gradually creates in his/her mind an idealized image of the self. Horney refers to this as self-idealization (1950): "Eventually the individual may

come to identify himself with his idealized, integrated image... The idealized image becomes an idealized self, and this idealized self becomes more real to him than his real life" (23).

This self-idealization coincides with Kunkel's domination of the ego-image and with the guiding principle of Adler. Also implicit in the concept of self-idealization is the rebellion that Allers proposed for neurotic development that hinders the recognition of one's own limits. This reveals an ethical choice between accepting or denying oneself. That is, the common psychological response of denial involves an ethical relationship of the person to reality. Horney called the capacity to accept reality "honesty" and referred to the lack of honesty as the unethical origin and the support for self-idealization. Self-idealization, once set, exerts a molding influence upon the whole personality and contaminates goals, behavior and relations to others.

In Adler's view, if the guiding principle acts as a psychological escape from the feeling of inferiority and uncertainty, then self-idealization grows into a more comprehensive drive, something Horney called "the search for glory". Neurotic ambition is the most obvious component of the search for glory, driven in some cases toward external success and toward a vindictive interpersonal triumph in others. Adler pointed to pride as the cause of preventing the neurotic from recognizing his/her limitations, an idea clearly developed more extensively by Horney (1950): "With all his strenuous efforts toward perfection and with all his belief in perfection attained, the neurotic does not gain what he most desperately needs: self-confidence and self-respect...Instead of solid self-confidence he gets a glittering gift of most questionable value: neurotic pride" (86–87).

Horney proposes that neurotic development weakens the very core of a person's being because the idealized self is an illusion, a cognitively constructed lie that alienates the person from their actual self and from their genuine but ignored capacities, the true self. In short, this fear-based defensive pride infiltrates all psychological processes: reason, emotions and willpower. An incessant effort then goes into maintaining the self-idealization through rationalizations, justifications, fantasies and other distortions. There is a constant struggle to find ways to make things appear different from what they are and this inner realm becomes more and more the only reality (Horney 1950): "This person sees in the mirror only his thoughts about the world and himself (91)...There is simply nothing that may not be invested with pride" (93).

As exclusion of the rest of the world also appears in Horney's thesis about neurosis, egocentricity is thus implicitly connected to this "pride system".

Our examination of Horney's theory gives us insight about how ethical and psychological conditions overlap and influence each other. Under Horney's approach, the original free decision to act egocentrically can end up severely affecting the psychological capacities that mitigate responsibility. This shows the complex interaction between ethical choices and psychological structures since the effected structures could also affect moral decisions. The crucial point of this complex interaction is that it must be understood as a dynamic or ongoing process in which new ethical and cognitive changes may create the conditions to reduce this egocentric position, liberating the person for greater flourishing. On the other hand, the person is still free to continue with rationalizations and excuses to maintain their self-idealization.

Horney described five tragic consequences for the neurotic: de-personalization, alienation from the self, lack of a sense of direction, continued failure to assume responsibility and finally, lack of unity. The pride system allows the neurotic to find pseudo-solutions through distorted attempts at integration. The neurotic thus descends into a destructive and painful process of depersonalization in which there is an impoverishment of the emotional

life. The more attached to the self-idealized image the neurotic becomes, the less contact there is with real feeling and thoughts. In this state, the general capacity for conscious experiences is much impaired. If neurotics do not assume responsibility they are at the mercy of their pseudo-solutions. This is what Horney calls neurotic attempts at solution.

Horney's exposition of neurotic development as both dynamic and destructive gives us insight into the fixed effect that egocentricity plays in the logic of the neurotic process. Egocentricity through fear draws psychic forces inward for the purpose of guaranteeing security. The more the fearful ego does this the greater the loss of contact with a positive interpersonal environment resulting in a still greater need to defend itself. The net result of this kind of "vicious circle" is a progressive depersonalization.

### **Igor Caruso: An Ethical and Metaphysical Meaning of Neurosis**

Igor Caruso has offered a theory of neurosis that includes both a metaphysical vision of reality and an ethical consideration (1954). Not satisfied with a purely psychological explanation, he proposed that neurosis has important ethical and spiritual dimensions. Neurosis thus has meaning on the biological, psychological, ethical and spiritual levels and has to be understood on all of them.

The most important contribution that Caruso made to the understanding of neurosis is his description of the phenomenon of the "absolutization" of what is relative; he posits it as a mechanism for developing neurosis. This phenomenon is an ethical judgment that the neurotic makes through false assessments after setting the self at the center of the universe. The individual as his/her own supreme value builds a universal system for the self where the rules are dictated by his/her own experienced feelings. Without using the term egocentricity, Caruso set this understanding as the crucial factor in neurotic development. Egocentricity or hypertrophy of the ego is what causes an absolutization of relative values. For Caruso, the error remains in the absolutization of the finite, of not seeing the whole picture and judging according to the perceived fragment; thus, it closes itself to the totality, but with the partial it adopts a totalitarian attitude.

For Caruso, this absolutization in neurosis represents a pride which, though almost always hidden, is not difficult to discern. It is pride that beats at the bottom of every enlarged sensitivity (e.g., egocentric-based absolutization) in neurosis and psychopathies (Caruso 1954). In spite of this contribution in his last period Caruso gradually abandoned this personalistic approach and adopted a kind of Marxist Freudianism.

### **Martin F. Echavarria: Consequences of the "Disorder of Self-Loving"**

Echavarria, following Thomas Aquinas, discussed the configuration of the personality in the context of the virtues. He declared that many neurotic disorders are accompanied by the absence of the fundamental virtues that prop up personality (Echavarria 2005). Virtue in this case is understood in Aquinas' terms: *ultimum potentiae*, the highest a person can aim at, in other words, the achievement of human possibilities in both the natural and super-natural realms. They amplify the determining motives of our behavior beyond what we conceive through our normal psychological capacities. Every act and decision under the effect of the virtues liberates the person for still greater flourishing. Aquinas described the consequences of the "disorder of self-loving" that coincides with the egocentricity we are presenting here. This "disorder of self-loving" is the origin of the Adler's guiding model or

fictitious aim. This false objective begins the organization of the neurotic character as it draws on the psyche and self-love and manages all affective and intellectual capacities. This produces cognitive distortions and an immature emotional life that leads the individual to the exaggerated use of defense mechanisms. When a person's ultimate goal is nothing more than oneself, he or she suffers a deformation of the whole affective, cognitive and willful nature of the person. This deformation of character shares common characteristics with the neurotic development described by Horney. The false organization of the neurotic character is similar to the artificial means or pseudo-solutions that Horney described. They are inaccurate attempts at integration and lead to a painful process of depersonalization in which there is emotional impoverishment. These distortions of character unify the personality in a pathological way, and only appear to overcome inner contradictions and conflicts. The disorder of self-loving then disintegrates the emotional core of the person. It is worthwhile dwelling a moment on the concept of pride to see the overlap with the descriptions made by the previously cited authors. Pride (*superbia*) is described as the first of all vices (tendencies opposed to virtues) because it intensifies and strengthens the other vices and promotes ultimately egotistical objectives. The lack of humility also produces a distortion of self-knowledge, which leads to a fictional self and an eagerness to be superior to others, which amounts to vainglory.

Another main contribution of Echavarría to understanding psychopathology is his thesis that the “capital vices” are derived from this disorder of self-loving. Capital vices appear as ramifications that lead to a great diversity of deformed character. Vanity, for example, is able to arrest free development, because, as Adler asserted (1912), it always makes the person think about what will capture consideration and admiration from others. Another example is pusillanimity or cowardice that is the other side of vainglory, but by default. Instead of maximizing one's potential by searching for something that demands more, “the pusillanimous person withdraws from his true potential by refusing the tendency towards what is proportionate to his potential” (Aquinas 1981). He or she hides behind a lack of knowledge of their character and motives as well as behind their fear of failure. The egocentricity underpinning vanity becomes apparent as attention is exaggeratedly directed toward oneself. The same does not happen with pusillanimity, which instead seems to encourage the shunning of attention, prestige or grandeur. Pieper (2010) hits the nail on the head when he associates pusillanimity with egocentricity. Indeed, the pusillanimous subject seeks absolute personal security at all cost, and this means: “egocentrically his eagerness is in protection of this security, but he will also fail when the achievement of goodness obliges him to stand pain” (205).

It would be helpful therefore to examine these capital vices more closely, as we shall see how many of their effects coincide with many descriptions of present clinical diagnoses. If virtue is a character style with interlocking behavioral, emotional and cognitive dimensions (MacIntyre 2007) to a coordinated whole, we could conceptualize vices as a character style that disintegrate or set up contradictions among behavioral, emotional and cognitive characteristics.

### **Paul C. Vitz: Selfism as Idolatry**

Finally, Vitz in his book “Psychology as religion: The cult of self worship” (1994) explained the hypothesis that the humanistic model of human behavior in recent decades unfortunately has been pervaded with this egocentric approach and that it has had a widespread appeal in our culture: “The consumer economy, combined with natural human

pride, has created a psychology that is focused on the individual's glorification of his or her own self" (124).

This widespread self-worship derived from humanistic psychology leads to a painful reality which is the breakdown of interpersonal relations. The distance and consequent alienation from others under the fundamental logic of self-actualization is what Vitz names "existential narcissism" and, like egocentricity, it may often be chosen in adult life. This process distances people from each other as well described by Herbert Hendin (1975) in *The Age of Sensation*, a psychoanalytic exploration of several hundred college-age young people: "This culture is marked by a self-interest and egocentrism that increasingly reduces all relations to the question: What am I getting out of it?...Society's fascination with self-aggrandizement makes many young people judge all relationships in terms of winning and losing points" (13).

To worship one's self (in self-realization) is simply an idolatry operating with the usual motive of unconscious egotism. Disguised self-love has been recognized as the source of idolatry. This idolatry of one's self coincides with Caruso's approach of absolutization of the finite. In this case, the egocentric person adopts a totalitarian attitude to one's self. Vitz also saw a link between disguised egocentricity and a clinical condition, in this case some forms of depression (1994): "Depression and negative thoughts about one self are often the result of aggression turned against the self, an aggression or self-hatred that occurs when one fails to meet one's own high standards for success. An enormous amount of pride lurks behind our attachment to the standards we fail to live up to" (131).

Vitz's principle contribution is the Christian perspective he offers to understand the bases of this egocentric trend. Regardless of whether it is fear, rebellion, social, psychological or biological circumstances combined with personal predispositions and temperament, the various ways pathological egocentricity is expressed can be understood as the vicissitudes of original sin. Egocentricity finds expressions at different stages of development and under different circumstances due to our fallen human nature (Vitz and Gartner 1989). Our current culture, instead of offering appropriate measures to overcome this egocentric trend and promote healthy and committed relationships, promotes and reaffirms this pseudo-value that condemns human beings to isolation under the illusion of self-realization at any cost. This author, however, offers Christian identification as a way to overcome this egocentric attitude, as it does not involve channeling human energies toward the self (Vitz and Gartner 1984): "Christian identification involves directing human energy towards God and receiving from Him a supernatural cathexis of divine love, an infusion of agape...The Holy Spirit thus allows for the expression of true altruism- agape- towards others" (86). Before following up on the relevance of a Christian understanding of egocentricity and its possible therapeutic application it will useful to very briefly extend the egocentric logic to more severe mental pathologies.

## Personality Disorders and Egocentricity

Many features of classical neurosis are currently included in personality disorders categories. It is then possible to conceptualize most personality disorders as lying somewhere on the dimension of egocentricity with the greatest pathology being associated with the most egocentric. This is not to suggest that free ethical choices are the only causes of these conditions, although it is possible that ethical choices are contributors to the pathology or more likely to maintaining pathology once established (Charland 2004). Below we give each condition an estimated and hypothetical Egocentricity score.

We begin with antisocial personality disorder probably the most common severe personality disorder. Using descriptive material from the DSM IV-TR (2001, p. 784), the degree of egocentricity for antisocial personality disorder is identified as very high by the following features: failure to conform to social norms; deceitfulness as indicated by repeated lying, use of aliases or conning others for personal profit or pleasure; irritability and aggressiveness; reckless disregard for safety of self or others; consistent irresponsibility and lack of remorse. Proposed Egocentricity score 10. Next, we take Narcissistic Personality Disorder (p. 799) as involving extreme egocentricity, however, to a somewhat lesser degree than the previous one. Narcissistic personalities are commonly aggressive, but they require excessive admiration of others and are interpersonally exploitative taking advantage of other to achieve his or her own ends. They have a sense of entitlement that leads them to a lack of recognition or identification with the feelings and needs of others. Proposed Egocentricity score 9. Another severe personality disorder would be Histrionic Personality Disorder (p. 795) with pervasive pattern of excessive emotionally and attention seeking. If they are not the center of attention, they may do something dramatic to draw the focus of attention to themselves. Proposed Egocentricity score 8. To take another serious pathology, Borderline Personality Disorder (p. 790) easily fits as an egocentric extreme from its description as they have inappropriate and intense anger or difficulty controlling anger, a pattern of unstable and intense interpersonal relationships and recurrent suicidal behavior, gestures or threats. Proposed Egocentricity score 7. Perhaps Cluster C personality disorders: avoidant, dependent and obsessive–compulsive personality disorders (p. 803) would represent a lower level of egocentricity than the preceding one. Some of the features derive from egocentric pusillanimous attitude. For example, dependent personalities need others to assume responsibility for most areas in her of his life and they go to excessive length to obtain nurturance and support from others. Avoidant personalities are unwilling to get involved with people unless certain of being liked and are usually reluctant to take personal risks or to engage in any new activities because they may prove embarrassing. Finally, Obsessive Compulsive personalities show perfectionism that interferes with task completion and are excessively devoted to work and productivity to the exclusion of leisure activities and friendships. Proposed Egocentricity score 6.

Then there would also be a continuous progression between the relatively normal “selfish”, person, the healthy virtuous person, the truly holy person focused on love of God and others and finally, the mystic in loving communion with God. Such proposed Egocentricity scores would range from around 5 to almost zero.

### **Christian Theological Foundations**

Any attempt to include ethics and psychology in the analysis of neurosis without using a rigorously founded theological concept as a base can imply a superficial conception. We find Christian theology to be an optimal framework to conceptualize this tendency towards egocentricity and the means to overcome it. From the Trinitarian Christian perspective, the relational unity (Trinitarian) called God becomes the prototype for all relationships in the created order. His way of loving becomes the measure of human love where then there is no place for radical disengagement or autonomy, because love “is an ongoing exodus out of the inward-looking self to its liberation in self-giving, and eventually the discovery of God” (Benedict XVI 2005). However, with the Fall of Eden, humankind made a decision to step out of this type of relationship with God, which had disastrous consequences at every level: with God, with others and with the rest of creation, and also on psychological

and spiritual levels. In extreme situations, as Vitz reminds us, at least some of the mental pathologies can arise from violation of the moral law (1994). Human hearts, initially possessing an urge for love, became under the impact of sin hearts of fear and shame. These distort relationships through egocentric self-protective strategies creating an illusion of security and superficial intimacy. The person is so self-absorbed that he or she is not able to become involved with another person to the point of letting the self be transformed by loving the other. Flexibility which implies a positive self-affirmation and positive affirmation of others is replaced by defensive rigidity. However, a person's experience of God's love can re-contextualize the whole affective and cognitive nature of the person and allows him/her to face rather than flee fearful situations. Both acquired and graced virtuous practices make possible the formation of specific dispositions, and therefore can reorder the affective relations to desires and difficulties. Establishing integration with one's goals assists discernment and judgment about the means to the end. Two main virtues have a crucial role in the maturity of affective and cognitive capacities; these are love and humility. Just as love embodies the life of all virtues and expresses the inmost substance of holiness, humility is the precondition and basic presupposition for the genuineness of all virtue (Von Hildebrand 1990). The liberation from self-protective strategies that promote egocentricity and hinder communion with the subsequent trust and deep respect cannot be attained without humility. The virtue of humility allows one to be really concerned not with one's ego, but with the objectively important, that which pleases God and others. The degree to which we shall achieve freedom to participate in God's life depends on the degree to which we are humble. This participation allows us to grasp the objective meaning of values in its independence from the pursuits of the ego, and honors them with an unhampered and adequate response. The virtue of humility then reorders the affective life because under its sway we can be deeply touched by inward appreciation and understanding of the truth. Although there may have been conditions to maintain this egocentric attitude, in a Christian anthropology a person in his/her nature has been endowed with the capacity to transcend him/herself, of conforming to something greater for its own sake (Von Hildebrand 1952). This capacity of self-giving is diametrically opposed to egocentricity. In consequence, it allows us to be centered on the object and free of egocentricity that lessens potentialities. This self-giving is one of the main effects of the virtue of charity, which has the character of a free given gift. Christian Charity calls for a continued growth that also enables the other virtues to develop. Self-giving allows us to develop new skills and dispositions as the virtues grow and unfold in a process of flourishing.

### **Recent Psychological Support for Virtue-Based Therapy**

The preceding rationale has considerable support from philosophy, theology and even from much common experience. However, in the last 15 years or so the field of academic and research psychology, for the first time, has also begun to emphasize the importance of the virtues for human well being. Initiated by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) and Peterson and Seligman (2004) under the title of "Positive Psychology" this movement (Lopez and Snyder 2003; Linley and Joseph 2004) gives support for the rationale described here of the fear-based egocentric nature of neurosis. Furthermore, this new virtue-based psychology strongly argues for a person to take a positive moral/ethical attitude in order to move away from pathology toward flourishing. (One example can be found in the psychological treatment of gratitude given book length coverage by Emmons and McCullough 2004). In advocating that a person chooses to develop virtue, positive psychology supports

the central tenet of this paper. Namely, that bad ethical choices can maintain, or in some cases, perhaps cause mental pathology and that good ethical choices, namely developing virtue lead to recovery and over time to flourishing. In short, positive psychology sets up a plausible rationale for why training in the virtues should be a helpful intervention in psychotherapy. A specific Catholic understanding of positive or virtue psychology has been described by Titus and Moncher (2009) and a treatment of the relevance of virtues for patient recovery is given in Waring (2012). Finally, an explicit program for introducing to the patient how to practice the virtues of humility and kindness (charity or self-giving love) in treating narcissism is presented in Trautman (2006) and Gudan (2010).

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