Virtuous Misanthropes

ABSTRACT: *Recent discussions of misanthropy consider misanthropy to be cognitive at its core, consisting of the judgment that humanity is a failure. If this judgment is justified, then one question is whether one can be both a misanthrope and virtuous. This article argues that cognitive misanthropes can adopt a sympathetic outlook on humanity which is a necessary step for being virtuous. This is because the sympathetic outlook requires the virtue of practical wisdom, a special virtue in being either necessary or necessary and sufficient for other virtues. The article then argues that virtue is open to even some misanthropes whose misanthropy is also affective. Given that dislike is a common affective state among misanthropes, the article focuses on misanthropes who dislike humanity (as opposed to those who, say, hate it or view it with contempt) and argues that dislike is compatible with virtue. Misanthropes are thus not condemned to non-virtuous lives.*

KEYWORDS: condemnatory outlook, misanthropy, practical wisdom, sympathetic outlook, virtue

Can one be both virtuous and a misanthrope? Can one be just, courageous, generous, compassionate, and so on, *and* dislike humanity? It is tempting to give a negative answer if we think that being virtuous precludes a general dislike of humanity (or vice versa). However, I argue that we should reject this tempting answer because a misanthrope can have and act on the conviction that humanity is *deserving of help*, which is compatible with the virtues. I also argue that this is true of two kinds of misanthropes, those who merely *believe* that humanity is bad ("cognitive misanthropes") and those who *also feel* negatively towards it ("affective misanthropes").

The compatibility of virtue and misanthropy is important for two reasons. First, being virtuous is a good state to aspire to and to which many people likely aspire. Being virtuous is not just doing the right thing, but doing it from a disposition "well entrenched in its possessor—something that, as we say, goes all the way down, unlike a habit such as being a tea-drinker—to notice, expect, value, feel, desire, choose, act, and react in certain characteristic ways. To possess a virtue is to be a certain sort of person with a certain complex mindset" (Hursthouse and Pettigrove 2023). But, while virtue is a good state, misanthropy is also a justified worldview, which some people might not only accept but on which they also build an *identity* as misanthropes. Being virtuous and being a misanthrope, however, seem incompatible, because if being a misanthrope means having negative emotions such as hatred and contempt toward fellow human beings, and if such negative emotions imply the lack of important virtues—kindness, compassion, caring, friendliness, generosity, and even justice and

courage—then one *cannot* be a virtuous misanthrope. Their compatibility, then, deserves discussion.

Second, this issue is important because it helps fill a lacuna in recent discussions of misanthropy. Philosophers who discuss misanthropy tend to agree that it is a judgement (belief, verdict) that humanity is a failure and that this judgment need not be accompanied by negative emotions typically attributed to misanthropes, such as dislike and hatred (Cooper 2018, 2021; Kidd 2021; Svoboda calls this "cognitive misanthropy" [2022: 8-9]). Despite this agreement, the literature is missing a sustained discussion of the misanthrope's moral orientation toward humanity as an answer to the question: How would or should a misanthrope morally approach humanity given her belief that it is a failure? The lacuna is bigger if misanthropy is affective, because we then need to know whether and how a misanthrope's negative emotions toward humanity are reconcilable with being moral towards it. A discussion of virtue fills in the lacuna because it shows that a misanthrope not only can do the right thing, but can do so from virtue, thereby acting fully morally—from proper motives and the requisite affective states.

My argument is divided into two parts. I start with cognitive misanthropes and argue that they can regard humanity as warranting help and treat it accordingly. This regard and treatment are best expressed through what I call a sympathetic outlook on humanity, as opposed to a condemnatory outlook. Because this treatment requires some form of practical wisdom, and because practical wisdom is either necessary or both necessary and sufficient for virtue, this treatment is compatible with virtue. Thus, cognitive misanthropes can treat humanity as deserving of help even as—indeed, *because*—they accept the belief that humanity is a failure (the "because" only rationally supports the sympathetic outlook, rather than necessitates it).

Second, I address affective misanthropes—misanthropes who both cognitively believe that humanity is a failure and who have negative emotions towards it, such as dislike, hatred, disgust, and contempt. Because it is the most common, I focus on dislike and argue that disliking humanity is compatible with being virtuous. I conclude with a brief discussion of the compatibility of some virtues with, and the special aptness of other virtues for, both cognitive and affective misanthropy.

Section I offers brief remarks to justify the misanthropic view. Section 2 explains the compatibility of cognitive misanthropy with a sympathetic outlook on humanity, thus filling in the above-mentioned lacuna in the literature. Section 3 connects wisdom to misanthropy via the sympathetic outlook, thus paving the way for virtue. Section 4 addresses the compatibility of affective misanthropy and virtue. Section 5 concludes with brief remarks.

1. Misanthropy and Its Justification

According to David Cooper, misanthropy is a "verdict or judgment on humankind" (2018: 3) to the effect that it has failed, morally and otherwise (2018: 7), a verdict directed at humanity as a whole or as a collective, not necessarily at individuals (2018: 9; cf. Svoboda 2022: 6-7). Toby Svoboda claims that it is the belief that human beings are bad (2022: 8, *passim*). He adds that a misanthrope "sincerely judges that

humans are bad, and views them accordingly, [though they] need not dislike, hate, or despise humanity" (2022: 8). Ian James Kidd, accepting Cooper's views, defends the compatibility of the misanthropic verdict with various practical stances (2021; cf. Svoboda 2022: 29-32). On these views, misanthropy is primarily a *cognitive* stance, compatible with various emotional stances (or even none), and directed primarily at humanity as a whole.

Consider now an argument for why humanity is a failure. The argument will be brief because it has been defended in the literature (it will also leave open the question *why* human beings fail, especially if such reasons might be irrelevant to the misanthropic verdict [Kidd 2021: 32]). Humanity is a failure because human beings tend to exhibit a broad range of deeply rooted intellectual and, especially, moral failings. Consider the following list from Cooper that includes six clusters of failings (2018: ch. 4). The first is the hatred cluster, characterized by hostility towards others ("hatred itself, malevolence, enmity, vengefulness, *Schadenfreude*, spitefulness and mean-spiritedness"). Second, there is the loutishness cluster, characterized by a "common disregard for others" ("boorishness, vulgarity, rudeness, and loutishness itself"). Third, mindlessness, characterized by obstructions to "the world and to the needs and goods of creatures, including one's self" ("carelessness, negligence, … insensitivity, intellectual laziness, prejudice and rigidity of outlook"). The fourth is bad faith, characterized by "avoidance to see things as they are" (towards one's own self: "self-deceit, willful ignorance and a proneness to be 'in denial'"; towards others: "infidelity, betrayal, lying, treachery and sanctimonious piety"). Fifth, there is vanity, characterized by thinking highly of oneself ("conceit, hubris, narcissism, … envy, self-pity … resentment at the success of others … ingratitude … [and] jealousy"). Finally, there is greed, characterized by "a self-centered desire for a future state of him- or herself," a preoccupation with "how best to procure what will satisfy the demands of the ego." Cooper also mentions other clusters such as "weakness of the will, cowardice and craven servility." All these failures are either moral or morally related (Svoboda is explicit that humanity's failure is moral [2022: *passim*]; see also Benatar 2015: 80-100).

Moreover, these failures are *pervasive* and occur across cultures, class, race, sex, gender, and age. They also *recur*: they have been with us since we have existed, though they sometimes peak (Svoboda 2022: 5). They are also "*entrenched*" (Cooper 2018: 13; 54), seemingly flowing from our very human nature. Moreover, much of human goodness is a *response to* human failure (e.g., compassion directed at victims of injustice, as opposed to those of an earthquake). Finally, human goodness and failure do not count morally equally. Svoboda claims that, one-to-one, moral ills count for more than moral goods (2022: 63).

The above remarks are offered in an effort to briefly justify the claim that humanity is a failure. Although they do not show that the claim is *true*, they, along with the work in the literature they summarize, arguably show that it is rational to accept humanity's failure. (Readers who are not convinced can construe the rest of this article's claim as a conditional: if misanthropy is justified, then misanthropes can be virtuous.) If this is correct, those who accept the misanthropic outlook are at the very least on equal epistemic footing with those who reject it. Thus the question of how one can be virtuous and a misanthrope is as live as it is acute.

2. Cognitive Misanthropy and Two Outlooks on Humanity

Granted that the misanthrope is justified in believing that humanity is a failure, how might they respond to this failure? The belief that humanity is a failure does not preclude the belief that it needs help, because, generally speaking, one response to failure is helping those who are failing, as when, for example, I help a student who is repeatedly failing her assignments. This is also true of humanity, which misanthropes can be open to helping as a response to its failure. Moreover, much as I can adopt a sympathetic outlook toward my failing student, misanthropes can adopt a sympathetic outlook on humanity, an outlook that especially lends itself to wanting to help. However, and much as I can also adopt a condemnatory outlook toward my student, thinking that she is not putting enough effort into her work, misanthropes can adopt a condemnatory outlook on humanity. Although the condemnatory outlook is compatible with helping my student, it does not lend itself as easily to this task as does the sympathetic one. This is also true of misanthropy: as I explain below, the condemnatory outlook is compatible with helping humanity, though it does not as easily lend itself to virtue as the sympathetic outlook does.

These outlooks are additional *cognitive* judgments that respond to the question: "Given that humanity is a failure, how should I view humanity? With sympathy or with condemnation?" (Note that because these are cognitive outlooks, "sympathetic" need not have connotations of affective gentleness or tenderness.) To elaborate: When one surveys the failures of humanity, one can adopt the sympathetic outlook that these failures result from human frailty or *weakness*, a weakness endemic to the human condition and that shows itself even in some terrible actions often described as evil. The weakness in question can take various forms, such as weakness of will, and acting on wrong motives and incentives. Alternatively, one can adopt the condemnatory outlook that our failures result from human *wickedness*, a wickedness endemic to the human condition exemplified in some terrible actions often described as evil. These two outlooks need not exhaust the options (indifference is a third option), but they are broad enough to be two of the main outlooks, such that other seemingly similar outlooks (e.g., compassionate and angry) could be variants of one or the other.

Each outlook is compatible with various explanations of why human beings fail (though the converse is not true, as some explanations of human failures are compatible with an indifferent outlook). To illustrate, suppose a Kantian-inspired account of moral failure—that the root of evil is acting from inclinations instead of duty—best explains the human condition.[1] Such an account has three basic elements: that (i) morally right actions can be done from proper, improper, or mixed motives; (ii) proper motives often conflict with our desires or personal interests; and (iii) people often fail to do the right thing from the right motive (or for the right reason). On this account, these failures can be viewed with sympathy or with condemnation. On the former, we are creatures who regularly fail owing to our weak constitution and debilitating circumstances (e.g., our upbringing), a constitution and circumstances

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[1] For discussion of Kant's doctrine of radical evil, see Wood (1999). Incidentally, Kant himself rejected misanthropy because it does not allow the proper execution of one's duties (see Kidd [2021: 33-35] for discussion).

that themselves exist because of some measure of (bad) luck. Knowledge of such facts justifies judgments of sympathy about humanity. On the latter condemnatory outlook, we are creatures who *can* rise above our constitution and circumstances, difficult as though this might sometimes be, yet we fail to do so. We often willfully and, sometimes knowingly, choose to do wrong, a fact that deserves condemnation. The condemnatory outlook receives further support from the fact that such failures cause tremendous suffering to fellow human beings and other sentient creatures.

Cognitive misanthropes can adopt either one of these outlooks because the belief that humanity is a failure rationally supports either outlook. Hence, a sympathizer with humanity is sympathetic precisely *because* of our regular failures. And a condemner of humanity is condemnatory precisely *because* of our regular failures. Why one person is a sympathizer while another is a condemner is likely a matter of personal values and individual psychology. Moreover, the "because" only rationally supports, and does not necessitate, either outlook, and whether humanity's failures rationally support one outlook *more* than the other is an interesting question whose answer might be underdetermined.

To illustrate, consider the following example, which I personally witnessed. A man and woman couple in their early sixties are walking on a sidewalk. They are walking stridently, and while the man seems lost in thought, the woman seems agitated. There are some pigeons on the sidewalk, and as the couple approaches them, the woman kicks one of the pigeons out of her way; the pigeon, caught off guard, couldn't fly away fast enough to avoid the kick. A bystander yells at her, "Why did you do that? What has this pigeon done to you?" The woman replies, "Mind your own [expletive] business." Such examples, which can be multiplied, should abide by two provisos. First, the examples have to be of bad or wrong actions. Second, the examples cannot be of just *any* such actions, but ones that can support either outlook. Some actions are so horrendous that they do not merit a sympathetic outlook.

The woman's action of kicking the pigeon is gratuitously cruel. Still, the sympathetic outlook considers the woman's kicking the pigeon as resulting from a *troubled* character—the choice is emblematic of a pattern of choices that human beings make and that *betokens their weak nature*, a troubled character being one example of such weakness. Frail characters in turn betoken our complicated psychologies that themselves, according to this outlook, are the result of factors largely outside our control, such as parental upbringing and the social environments where we find ourselves. This justifies a way to look at humanity as *pathetic* (without the pejorative connotation) and thus in need of *help*.

In contrast, the condemnatory outlook considers the woman's choice as resulting from a *corrupt* character—the choice is emblematic of a pattern of choices that human beings make and that *betokens their wicked nature*—a corrupt character being one example of such wickedness. Although wicked characters in turn betoken our complicated psychologies that themselves are the result of factors outside our control, such as parental upbringing and the social environments where we find ourselves, we are capable of acting contrary to our character to do the right thing, yet we fail to do so; we regularly make the wrong choices though we can make the right ones and act on them. This justifies a way to look at humanity as *discreditable* and thus as deserving of *active hostility*, *passive hostility* (exemplified in not harming

people but also in not helping them), *or help*. Although it is clear why the condemnatory outlook is compatible with active and passive hostility, being compatible with help requires explanation. Briefly, it is because a condemner of humanity might see herself as bound by moral or religious restrictions that require her to do what she is at least morally obliged to do. Or she might not see herself as bound by such obligations, but owing, say, to her upbringing, she feels the need to be helpful. Her general approach is that, despite their corruption, we may not morally neglect human beings.

In short, while the sympathetic outlook takes individuals to have troubled characters, and humanity in general to be pathetic and thus deserving of help, the condemnatory outlook takes individuals to have corrupt characters, and humanity in general to be discreditable and thus deserving of various approaches, from hostility to help.

The sympathetic outlook is clearly compatible with robust moral approaches toward fellow human beings: if humanity is in need of help, this help can take various forms. Most obviously, help can take the form of charity, but it can also reflect the different values found in various virtues (Swanton 2003: 41-48). One helps by being fair, just, or even merely polite (e.g., not pointing out others' foibles). One helps by expressing love, compassion, and friendliness. One helps by being benevolent, generous, caring, and, importantly, courageous. I do not mean that the helping actions are necessarily virtuous, only that they reflect the kind of values or reasons found in these virtues. The point is that the person with the sympathetic outlook has the cognitive and motivational receptivity to act in these ways. This is an expansive notion of help, one that goes beyond charity. It is supported by the idea that acts such as those of justice, courage, politeness, generosity, kindness, and friendliness reflect the moral values needed for humanity to manage its existence as much as possible given the moral quagmire in which it is mired.

If the condemnatory outlook is compatible with helping humanity, how does it differ from the sympathetic outlook? The relevant difference lies in moral psychology. The sympathizer's moral psychology is fertile soil for the virtues to take root, whereas that of the condemner-but-helper is not. First, a sympathizer with humanity is likely to desire to do more than is morally required, such as supererogatory actions, whereas the condemner of humanity might only do the minimum needed. More importantly, although the sympathetic outlook is cognitive, the sympathizer has the requisite emotional *receptivity* to possessing and acting from virtue, whereas the condemner is less likely to be receptive. That is, the sympathetic outlook allows its agent to be more disposed to the cultivation and experience of those emotions that are part of the virtues of character, such as compassion as one acts kindly, pleasure as one acts generously, and anger as one acts justly. The condemnatory outlook makes it difficult for its agent to be disposed to cultivate and experience such emotions. It is a cognitive stance more hospitable to moral actions done begrudgingly or strictly from duty. It is also open to problematic emotions: a person with such an outlook might feel contempt for a victim of injustice as they also stand up for them. Finally, a truly sympathetic misanthrope also sees himself in need of help, which assimilates him to others, thereby helping him avoid feeling contempt or paternalism toward others. Although a condemnatory misanthrope might also feel contempt for himself, this way

of seeing himself is either irrelevant to his ability to avoid being contemptuous or paternalistic toward others, or, worse, exacerbates these emotions.

It is then the sympathetic misanthrope who has the psychological wherewithal to be receptive to the virtues. His psychological make up lends itself to having the virtues.

Note that the adoption of one or the other of these outlooks is one way to convert cognitive misanthropy from being merely a belief (and one that many people have likely had at some point) to being an identity of sorts. This is because the adoption of one of these outlooks implies other beliefs, attitudes, and actions that misanthropes would have toward humanity. For instance, a misanthrope who adopts the condemnatory view will likely have her actions, beliefs, attitudes, and values affected by this outlook. In this respect, the misanthrope might take her negative appraisal of humanity to be, in the words of Kathryn Norlock, "appropriate, weighty, and governing of other aspects of their moral outlook or character" (2021: 45).[2] Put differently, an outlook (condemnatory or sympathetic) converts someone's mere belief that humanity is a failure into a sustained way of viewing and treating fellow human beings.

Three other things to briefly note about the outlooks are the following. First, neither outlook is universal. The sympathetic outlook, for instance, accepts that some individual actions or human beings might not deserve a sympathetic approach and should be condemned as evil. Second, both outlooks can be held temporarily, permanently, or anywhere in between. Important for virtue are those cases in which the sympathetic outlook is consistently held, or held long enough for the virtues to take root and grow. Whether after one has the virtues it is still possible to revert to the condemnatory outlook is an interesting issue, which I lack the space to address. Third, these outlooks differ from some others found in the literature, such as optimism and pessimism (Cooper 2018: 5-7; Kidd 2021: 32) and Kidd's typology of practical misanthropic stances, many of which are compatible with either outlook. Indeed, the two outlooks can explain why some misanthropes in Kidd's typology shun humanity while others don't (Kidd 2021).

3. The Sympathetic Outlook and Practical Wisdom

The sympathetic outlook does not imply virtue; it only paves the way for it by explaining why being a misanthrope does not imply a *lack* of virtue. Moreover, this paving is not necessarily temporal. The idea is not that one *first* becomes a misanthrope, *then* decides on which outlook to adopt, *then* develops natural virtue (a disposition to goodness whose further completion or perfection would require wisdom; see Aristotle 2002: 1144b1-9), and then decides to become virtuous in the full sense. Although such temporal sequences can occur, the point is that the moral psychology of a misanthrope is such that it does not bar her from being virtuous because she can be sympathetic toward humanity.

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[2] Norlock objects that being a misanthrope can't just be a matter of having misanthropic beliefs and must go deeper; otherwise, we'd all be misanthropes (2021: 48). Lisa Gerber similarly argues that on cognitive misanthropy "everyone who systematically condemns humanity is a misanthrope" (2021: 76). The adoption of one of the two outlooks is one way to fill the gap between belief and identity, thus addressing Norlock's and Gerber's objection.

How does this sympathy for humanity pave the way for virtue? I mentioned that the sympathetic outlook easily lends itself to the judgment that humanity needs help. Although this judgment alone need not dispose one to act on it (one might, so to speak, "sit on" it), one might also be disposed to act on it, and it is this type of person that interests us because it is he who demonstrates how the sympathetic outlook is compatible with virtue. Let's focus, then, on the misanthrope who not only adopts the sympathetic outlook, but who is disposed to act on it.

When it comes to action, helping humanity is both monistic and pluralistic. It is monistic because the situations that call for help stem from a single phenomenon, namely, our weakness (remember that common to all actions of helping humanity under the sympathetic outlook is that they are responses to our frailty). It is pluralistic because help can take various forms: some situations call for fairness, others for courage, others for caring, others for honesty, others for patience, and still others for mere politeness. Some situations call for interference, others for standing back.

The person with the sympathetic outlook can get many of these situations wrong. She can, owing to misunderstanding, lack of wisdom, or some other deficiency, stand up for someone whereas she should have remained silent. She can tell the truth without showing enough compassion. She can be "fair" to the wrong party. Despite their hearts being in the right place—a characteristic of wanting to help—many people bungle moral situations. Moreover, if one really wants to help humanity, one is likely to be receptive to the idea that one's help ought to be both *the right kind* of help and to be correctly rendered in any given situation (I say "likely" because someone might want to help humanity but not care that their help hits the target): *this* situation calls for silence; *that* situation requires telling the truth but *in* a compassionate way; and *that* other situation requires fairness, but to X, not to Y.

Being receptive to rendering the right kind of help and in the right way, however, implies being receptive to having practical wisdom, because having practical wisdom enables one to specify the kind of help needed in a particular situation and how to attain it. (This receptivity is not likely to involve beliefs or attitudes about practical wisdom—that is, it is likely to be *de re*, though it can be *de dicto*—because most people are not versed in Aristotelian or virtue ethics.) Aristotle, discussing practical wisdom, claims that it is "characteristic of a wise person to be able to deliberate well about the things that are good and advantageous to himself, not in specific contexts … but about what sorts of things conduce to the good life in general" (*NE* 1140a25). He then specifies that it is "a true disposition accompanied by rational prescription, relating to action in the sphere of what is good and bad for human beings" (*NE* 1140b5). Practical wisdom's connection to action, then, shows that it is not just abstract reasoning about what is good for human beings, but it also directs the agent about how to act in particular situations.

Daniel Russell argues that having practical wisdom includes at least three elements: knowing what good is at stake in a situation—e.g., generosity; a specification of the good; and the means of attaining the specific good, e.g., generosity through money-lending (2014: 204-206). Crucially, for practical wisdom to properly specify the good in question, it must do so "in concert with a

wide array of other relevant ends and concerns" (Russell 2014: 208). In this way, practical wisdom unifies the virtues: someone is not wise if she acts generously but at the expense of fairness.

My specific concern with practical wisdom is, *per* the above paragraph, with its elements that are oriented to the human good in general, the right or correct perception of a situation, and the proper way to execute the action, because these elements reflect the proper or correct way to help humanity. As I argued above, someone with the sympathetic outlook who desires to help humanity would be receptive to helping it correctly. Because correctly helping humanity requires understanding what is good and bad for it, understanding the specific situation, and understanding how to address the situation, correctly helping humanity has a structure that mirrors the three basic components of practical wisdom. Thus, someone with the sympathetic outlook who desires to properly help humanity would be receptive to having practical wisdom. In this way, the sympathetic outlook is compatible with practical wisdom.

At this point, however, we reach a fork in the road because we can understand sympathetic misanthropes' receptivity to practical wisdom in two ways. The first reflects one general tendency among Aristotelian virtue ethicists to accept the reciprocity thesis, that having one virtue entails having the others. Aristotle himself is explicit about this when it comes to practical wisdom: "it is not possible to possess excellence … without wisdom, nor to be wise without excellence of character" (*NE* 1145a1). Practical wisdom is then both necessary and sufficient for the other virtues. This means that sympathetic misanthropes' receptivity to practical wisdom would entail receptivity to *all* the virtues, even if the receptivity is only *de re*. The second way to understand sympathetic misanthropes' receptivity to practical wisdom is as only necessary for the other virtues, in which case sympathetic misanthropes' receptivity to practical wisdom does not entail receptivity to all the virtues, only to the knowledge that practical wisdom provides and to acting on that knowledge.

The first option is more interesting for my thesis, but the second one deserves brief discussion. Textual evidence from Aristotle aside (see Callard 2017 for such evidence), there are two reasons for thinking that practical wisdom is not sufficient for virtue. First, and intuitively speaking, it is implausible to deprive continent agents of *some*—perhaps partial?—form of practical wisdom, given that they know the right thing to do and act on it. Second, the reasoning and actions of continent agents display many of practical wisdom's functions. For example, the functions of handling conflicts, setting ends of action, finding the best way to attain the end, and the awareness of the reasons for pursuing the action (Miller 2021: 55-58), are functions that continent agents execute. Despite the fact that continent agents are tempted to do otherwise, which is what distinguishes them from the virtuous, they do correctly understand a situation and act accordingly for the right reasons. As Aristotle says, "the self-controlled [person] knows that his appetites are bad but does not follow them because of what reason tells him" (*NE* 1145b11).

If practical wisdom is necessary but not sufficient for virtue, sympathetic misanthropes are one step closer to virtue: their desire to do the right thing paves

the way to acquiring practical wisdom, which paves the way to acquiring the other virtues. Hence, sympathetic misanthropy is compatible with virtue.

More interesting, however, is the idea that practical wisdom is also sufficient for virtue. This is an idea accepted by quite a few virtue ethicists.[3] For instance, Julia Annas states, "practical intelligence [wisdom] develops over your character as a whole, in a holistic way. You can't develop generosity in the absence of fairness and tact; … To the extent that you are truly generous, you get everything right when acting generously, and to do this you have to get things right in other aspects of your character also" (2011: 86). More recently, Russell has argued that practical wisdom is the virtue that turns an indeterminate good into a determinate one by finding the mean. The idea is that in tasks that contain multiple interacting elements, acting well regarding one is also acting well regarding the others: "To tell the truths one should, to the persons one should, when one should, in the manner one should, and for the purpose one should—to find the mean of forthrightness—one must tell the truth in a way that is *also* thoughtful, tactful, benevolent, courageous, and temperate" (Russell 2021: 11). Since acting virtuously implicates not only right decision-making and acting but also feeling the right emotions, all these elements are found in practically wise people. Unlike the continent, practically wise people, and hence also virtuous ones, are not tempted to do the wrong thing (though they can feel internal conflict; see Schuster 2020). Their emotions and values are in agreement with right reason.

Can sympathetic misanthropes be receptive to this strong form of practical wisdom? Yes. Consider sympathetic misanthropes' reaction upon realizing that receptivity to acquiring wisdom means receptivity to acquiring the virtues. Once committed to the idea of helping humanity (which is what sympathetic misanthropy is about), then, as argued above, they are committed to helping it in the right ways. Minimally, and put negatively, they have no reason to reject the idea that this would include the right affective reactions and the lack of base appetites. There is no reason for them to be receptive to knowing what and how to do the right thing while rejecting the proper accompanying affective states. Nor does sympathetic misanthropy, as a form of cognitive misanthropy, dictate which emotional states such misanthropes have.

Additionally, and put positively, a commitment to helping humanity gives sympathetic misanthropes two reasons to be receptive to having the virtues. First, helping others is often a morally delicate matter. Doing so begrudgingly, coldly, frustratedly, angrily, resentfully, or arrogantly puts the recipient in a morally compromised situation, where they are condescended to, treated as barely deserving of assistance, or regarded as pitiful. Properly helping others, then, requires the appropriate affects and attitudes to help ward off the possible condescension, paternalism, and so on that can easily come to us in our relationships with others: "personal reactive attitudes rest on, and reflect, an expectation of, and demand for, the manifestation of a certain degree of goodwill or regard on the part of other human beings towards ourselves" (Strawson 1962: 200). Since the virtues supply these appropriate affects, sympathetic misanthropes

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[3] However, Miller claims that practical wisdom is not standardly taken to be sufficient for virtue (2021: 53).

have a reason to want to accept the virtues if they have a reason to want to properly help others.

Second, sympathetic misanthropes do not exclude themselves from humanity's failures—they, too, are liable to fail in those ways that their fellow creatures fail. They thus have a reason to want to cultivate traits that would help them avoid these failures, and the virtues are excellent candidates. Although attempting to morally improve others might be paternalistic, morally improving ourselves is not. Of course, we can always aspire to lesser character states, such as continence (which is nothing to scoff at), but this does not deny that sympathetic misanthropes still have a good reason to aspire to virtuousness.

If these arguments are plausible, at least one type of misanthrope, the sympathetic one, can be virtuous, and they can be so through receptivity to practical wisdom, whether it is only necessary to the other virtues or both necessary and sufficient.

By contrast, condemnatory misanthropy is not easily compatible with virtue. Let us start with friendship because it nicely illustrates this incompatibility. Viewing human beings as corrupt such that their failures betoken a wicked character disables condemnatory misanthropes from forming genuine friendships. For insofar as friendship involves a good amount of love, understanding, and empathy between friends, and given that friends, in virtue of being human, are liable to fail in various ways (*qua* friends and *qua* human beings), viewing them as corrupt seems incompatible with the love, understanding, and empathy requisite for friendship.

Condemnatory misanthropy, however, makes virtue difficult in all domains of life, not just in friendship, because having the proper emotions and affects in dealing with fellow human beings seems incompatible with viewing them as corrupt and wicked. One can act morally toward them out of a sense of duty, one close to the (mistaken) target of many of Kant's critics, in conjuring the image of doing what is right because one, simply, *has to* (Baron 1995: Part II). In this respect, a partial form of practical wisdom that enables its possessor to know what and how to do the right thing, is all that condemnatory misanthropes are likely to have.

The likely incompatibility of condemnatory misanthropy with virtue helps address a potential objection to the claim in the introduction that misanthropy appears to be incompatible with virtue. The objection is that if misanthropy is simply a matter of belief, as Cooper, Kidd, and Svoboda claim, then misanthropes' virtue is not threatened, because there seems no connection between believing that human beings fail and one's virtue being undermined (indeed, believing that humanity fails might be necessary for virtue or, more generally, for being moral). Thus, condemnatory misanthropy's incompatibility with virtue shows that not just any cognitive misanthropy is compatible with virtue, and that at least one form it takes is not. The virtue of a condemnatory misanthrope can indeed be threatened given this outlook. So we have a response to the objection.

Still, the objection is important, for it implies that affective misanthropy—a misanthropy that is not just cognitive—might very well threaten misanthropes' virtue, because some negative emotions seem incompatible with virtue. Moreover, misanthropy is not commonly understood as just cognitive. In the next section, I address this issue by discussing how at least one type of affective misanthrope— the one who *dislikes* humanity (as opposed to, say, the one who hates it)—can be

virtuous. I retain from this section the idea that such a misanthrope can adopt the sympathetic outlook, with its receptivity to want to help humanity. This retention should not be controversial since, generally speaking, we can be sympathetic toward people whom we dislike.

4. Affective Misanthropy and Virtue

Cognitive misanthropy, in rejecting the necessity of negative emotions or stances toward humanity, strays far from common understandings of misanthropy. In addition to a number of misanthropic characters in literature presented as haters or dislikers of humanity (see Shklar 1984: ch. 5; Gibson 2017: *passim*), dictionaries define "misanthropy" as "a dislike of humankind" (OED); "a hatred or distrust of humankind" (Merriam-Webster); "the fact or quality of not liking other people" (Cambridge Dictionary); and "the general hatred, dislike, distrust, or contempt of the human species, human behavior, or human nature" (Wikepedia). These definitions differ on the misanthropic emotions, listing dislike, hatred, distrust, and contempt. This is not surprising given that common understandings tend to be messy, and it is less surprising with misanthropy because misanthropes have expressed various emotions towards humanity. For instance, both Alceste and Philinte in Molière's *The Misanthrope* are misanthropes, but the former displays hatred toward others, whereas the latter expresses serenity and acceptance of them.

I focus on dislike for three reasons. First, "dislike" appears in almost every definition of "misanthropy," making it a common denominator of these definitions. Second, while misanthropes can at different times experience various emotions toward humanity, perhaps dislike is common to or underlies them. This does not mean that every misanthrope who dislikes humanity has one or more of the listed emotions; it only means that those who do have these emotions likely also dislike humanity. Of course, this is an empirical claim awaiting verification, but it seems plausible to believe that various affective misanthropes converge on disliking humanity. Dislike, then, might be both a definitional and a psychological common denominator. Third, and relatedly, emotions other than dislike do not characterize misanthropes generally enough. For example, hatred is a rare emotion given that it is commonly understood as wishing the destruction of its object, and few people seem to have this emotion for many or most human beings, let alone in a sustained way (Fischer et al. 2022). Besides, many misanthropes don't want to destroy humanity, only to avoid it (Edyvane 2013: 54; Kidd 2021). Thus, focusing on dislike is apt.

Is disliking humanity compatible with virtue? One strategy to show their compatibility (which I don't pursue) is as follows. *Per* Cooper's view, misanthropy's verdict is directed at humanity as a whole, not necessarily at individuals (2018: 9); as Kidd puts it, "if misanthropy is an attitude toward something collective—humanity or human forms of life—then it does not distribute over individuals" (2022: 79). So in the case of affective misanthropes, their dislike of humanity is directed at humanity as a class, thereby leaving the moral-psychological door open for virtue: Veronica dislikes humanity as a collective, but she likes her friends, her family, etc. This indicates that her character is open to virtue.

I don't go this route because while this reasoning is plausible, it is problematic for the following two reasons. First, it can be applied to those misanthropes who hate or have contempt for humanity, for they, too, can hate humanity as a collective but not as individuals. This seems too easy. Second, dislike of groups is not usually confined to the group as such and tends to spill over to individuals: dislike, say, of a racial group, typically targets individuals perceived as being members of that racial group.

To see the compatibility of dislike with virtue, we need a plausible account of dislike and a plausible picture of a misanthrope who dislikes humanity. First, dislike. In his essay on love as intense liking, Glen Koehn takes liking to be a common-sense notion, which he characterizes as "desiring and delighting in some aspect of [what is liked]" (2011: 728).⁴ Similarly, Sam Shpall claims, "to like something is to be disposed to enjoy it, feel affection for it, experience attraction to it" (2018: 114). Shpall intends the list as disjunctive (personal correspondence, March 4, 2023). I focus on Koehn's account because it is simple while seemingly capturing what we mean by "liking." If disliking is the opposite of liking, then disliking would be not desiring or delighting in some aspect of what is disliked. Koehn also claims that to like something is consistent with disliking it, because one can like something in one aspect but dislike it in another (2011: 728). I desire and delight in Sharon's company because of her lacerating wit, but I don't desire or delight in her company because she overstays her visits. This aspectual liking and disliking need not always create an inner conflict because one might like or dislike someone *overall*: I dislike Sharon (overall) because of her tendency to overstay her visits, and despite her wit.

Moreover, similar to other emotions and affects, dislike is dispositional, experienced under certain conditions, and it is not experienced every minute. Much like X can like Y overall even though X does not feel it every minute, W might dislike Z even though W does not feel the dislike every minute. In addition, X's liking Y need not preclude times when X dislikes Y—when, say, Y's aspects that X dislikes are especially pronounced. Crucially, the reverse is also true: W's dislike for Z need not preclude times when W likes Z, when, say Z's likeable properties are especially pronounced.

This view of dislike is plausible because it seems to account for many instances of it. Moreover, we *need* a plausible account of dislike to avoid the accusation that the account is gerrymandered to show the compatibility of dislike and virtue.

Next, consider a plausible portrait of the misanthrope who dislikes humanity. The usual portraits of misanthropes tend to be of reclusive and dysfunctional people. But misanthropes are "everywhere" and are more likely functional individuals with regular jobs than such portraits imply; misanthropes are likely more like Philinte than Alceste, more like the Larry Davids of the world (minus the annoyance, hopefully) than its Miss Havishams. Indeed, given that human beings are social animals, this is to be expected. Although there are no studies that address how many misanthropes exist in any population, some imply their common-ness (e.g., Melgar

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⁴ Little is written in philosophy on liking and disliking. Psychology treats the issue as it relates to specific contexts (e.g., relationships, politics). Prestwich characterizes liking using four elements: "an interest, preference, attraction or fondness for somebody based on their traits and actions" (2024: 52). These four elements can be analyzed using Koehn's "desire and delight in."

et al. 2013). A number of websites also make the point about misanthropes being among us: "While misanthropes express a general dislike for humanity on the whole, they generally have normal relationships with specific individuals" (Bionity 2024).

Moreover, we are all born into social and personal relationships, and by the time we are mature enough to be misanthropes, few have the luxury to withdraw from the world. Thus, affective misanthropes' moral psychology has a duality: the ability to sustain relationships of various kinds—friendships, love, collegiality—while disliking humanity. This is not just the idea that misanthropes can esteem some individuals "of outstanding and unusual moral attainment" (Kidd 2021: 33), which is true, but also the idea that misanthropes *like* some individuals who need not be of outstanding moral attainment, that they sustain various social and personal relationships with people, some of whom the misanthrope might dislike overall, and that they deal with various strangers whom the misanthrope is disposed to dislike. Of course, unlike my dislike of Sharon, which is based on my knowledge of her, misanthropes' tendency to dislike strangers is not based on their knowledge of them, but on the basis of an inductive judgment: because most people have acted on and displayed bad traits, this new person is also likely to do so. However, a misanthrope might come to like individual people once they know them better. And even if they don't, they can still like some aspects of them.

In brief, misanthropes can like (even love) individual people overall, dislike other individual people overall (and either like some of their aspects or none), and are disposed, on the basis of what the past has informed us, to dislike people they don't know.

Armed with the idea that affective misanthropes can adopt the sympathetic outlook (which, recall, is cognitive, compatible with various emotional stances), they, *at minimum*, can see themselves as bound by moral duty and hence attend to others on that basis. In this regard, Svoboda argues that *disliking* humanity (as opposed to hating or having contempt for it) is compatible with fulfilling one's moral obligations to others, including respecting them and promoting their well-being (2022: 29). But we can go further to show how an affective misanthrope who dislikes humanity can be virtuous and act virtuously. Consider the following example.

Veronica dislikes humanity. She recoils from seeing how people often act in public, on social media, or in social gatherings. She is disgusted by people's silence and inaction in the face of injustice and other morally atrocious acts. She is saddened by people's tendency to prefer to lead comfortable lives rather than help others or improve themselves. These (non-exhaustive) emotions and reasons sustain Veronica's dislike of humanity. Her dislike makes her want to avoid the company of others as much as possible. It causes her to want to submerge herself in her own life —her work, hobbies, and so on.

But Veronica is already part of a social network from which it is virtually impossible to extract herself: the network of her co-workers, her family, her friends, and her inevitable daily interactions with strangers. From some of these networks, she does *not want* to extract herself because she does seek and enjoy the company of some friends and colleagues. When her friend Beth asks for help with grocery shopping, Veronica generously and happily drives her to the supermarket and back. When she witnesses her boss yet again dismiss in a meeting the remarks of her colleague Omar, she

willingly and courageously speaks in his defense. When she comes across a mother and her two children sitting at a downtown corner asking for money, Veronica sympathetically gives them money. When she interacts with strangers or colleagues during social occasions, she is friendly in her demeanor and words.

The above examples of some virtuous acts (generosity, courage, benevolence, and friendliness) should be supplemented by three points. First, Veronica need not be under any illusion that the people with whom she interacts, including her colleagues, friends, and strangers, might, and likely do, have the usual gamut of moral failings. Despite this, she evinces some liking toward them during their interactions, a liking that is psychologically possible because, *per* the points above, one can like someone in some aspects but dislike them in others, and one can like others in particular situations whom one is disposed to generally dislike. Veronica might dislike her colleague Omar because of various aspects that he has, yet like him when she feels sympathy for him as a victim of their boss's unfairness.

Second, the examples indicate that Veronica exhibits, in each situation, the right decision as to what to do, the right motivation, and the right emotional reaction. This in turn indicates that she can perform virtuous acts, and be disposed to perform them consistently, despite her general dislike of humanity. In this respect, affective misanthropy is compatible with virtue. Indeed, we can see this point as follows: if there are or can be virtuous people, and if (plausibly, I think!) at least some of them dislike (some) other people, and given that it is not a requirement on being virtuous that one like everybody, then some virtuous people could also dislike people in general. Thus, dislike of others seems compatible with virtue.

Third, because Veronica exhibits the proper states that are part of acting from virtue, she does not paternalistically or condescendingly act toward others. This point is important because it shows that affective (and cognitive) misanthropes need not have a holier-than-thou attitude. Relatedly, it indicates that misanthropes need not believe themselves to be off the hook of human failure: they know that they, too, are liable to commit the failures that their fellow human beings commit. Not even virtue shields them from such failures, because although being virtuous avoids various failings, other failings might be caused by defects in personality or moods, and others by the fact that most people are not perfectly virtuous (hence Rosalind Hursthouse's inclusion of "characteristically" in the criterion for virtuous right action [1999: 28, 78]).

If the above is plausible, virtue is compatible with affective misanthropy understood as dislike of humanity. Since disliking humanity is a common way of understanding misanthropy and a common affect among misanthropes, the conclusion that misanthropy and virtue are compatible is substantive.

The compatibility of virtue and misanthropy has limits, however. First, virtue might not be compatible with other misanthropic emotions, such as hatred and contempt, whose very nature might block the development of virtue. With others—sadness, disappointment, disgust, mistrust, woe—it is unclear.[5] Dislike works because it is a "soft" affect that need not block virtue.

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[5] A reminder that the issue is the sympathetic, not condemnatory, misanthrope's virtue. The compatibility of such emotions with the sympathetic outlook or virtue require studies of their own, given that some philosophers

Second, whether affective misanthropy—and even cognitive misanthropy—are compatible with virtue depends on which traits are virtues. For instance, if the love of the individual because of a universally shared property that human beings have—say, being a child of God, human, or rational (Velleman 1999)—is a virtue, misanthropy is incompatible with it. As universal contempt blocks virtue, so does universal love block misanthropy. Thus, if universal love is a virtue, then either this virtue is incompatible with misanthropy or loving humanity is, somehow, compatible with disliking it.

Another virtue incompatible with misanthropy is Ryan Preston-Roeder's "faith in humanity." To have this virtue, according to Preston-Roeder, one must look for evidence of goodness in people and, "as a result, [one] is somewhat more likely than [one's] peers to judge that people are decent, or that they have behaved well" (2013: 667). Misanthropes are not wont to judge people decent, so if faith-in-humanity is a virtue, then misanthropes can't have it.

More damningly, if the reciprocity-of-virtue thesis is true, and if one or both of the above traits is a virtue, then virtue, period, is closed off to misanthropes, no matter how sympathetic they are. Here, something has to give if some of us are to be virtuous misanthropes: either the reciprocity thesis is false, or one or both of these two virtues is a pretender to the throne. One strategy to decide this issue is as follows. Start with a list of virtues and then argue that misanthropy is incompatible with one or more virtue on the list, such as love of humanity or faith in it. Another strategy is to reject the reciprocity thesis. A third strategy—to my mind the most interesting—starts with misanthropy as a plausible thesis and concludes that neither love of nor faith in humanity is a virtue. Space limitations prevent me from pursuing them.

Although the above two virtues are not compatible with misanthropy, we should remember that other virtues are. Some are the usual ones: because we live in a world vitiated with human failure, we need justice, courage, caring, honesty, and patience, and tact to face it and help humanity as much as we can. These virtues befit not only misanthropes but anyone who desires to ameliorate the world. But other (possible) virtues are especially, though not uniquely, befitting of misanthropy. Briefly, consider that we need *fortitude* to face the ills of the world in light of the knowledge that humanity has failed; *hope* to sustain ourselves, our moral work, and the belief that our lives are worth living despite our failures (Smith 2022), though hope might be closed off to those misanthropes who are also pessimists; *cheerfulness* to keep our spirits up in the face of these failures (Pettigrove 2022); and *solitude* to withdraw from the world as needed to stay morally and psychologically healthy (Swanton 2018).

5. Concluding Remarks

One question that might occur to the reader is the following: What if the misanthropic judgment is false, even if it is justified or highly likely true? Would

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speak of "good hate" and "good haters" (see Murphy 2016, and Cox and Levine 2022). See Bell for cases of apt contempt (2013: 147-151).

the sympathetic misanthrope's virtue be beyond her reach if she is wrong about the state of humanity?

No. The misanthropic judgment is, I think, a theoretical judgment about the moral state of the world, and is not in itself a practical judgment, even though it lends itself to practical outlooks and steps (e.g., the sympathetic outlook and what follows from it). If so, its falsehood would not undermine the misanthrope's virtue. To explain, two misanthropes can have the same belief about the world, yet one, say, chooses to cultivate virtue while the other does not. The cultivation of virtue is thus not entailed by the misanthropic judgment. If God were to reveal to the sympathetic, virtuous misanthrope that she is wrong about humanity, she would not be logically or rationally compelled to retract her virtue. Her reaction might be, "Well, I was wrong about the state of humanity. But, regardless, there are, and will likely always be, massive and pervasive moral shortcomings that need to be dealt with. So virtue is still needed."

This is a good conclusion to reach, because as much as some of us are rationally and emotionally inclined—even compelled—to be misanthropes, it would be better if we were wrong about it. After all, we shouldn't want humanity to be a failure. But even if part of us wants us to be wrong about humanity's failure, no part of us should want us to be wrong about the goodness of virtue.

I have argued that virtue is not closed off to misanthropes who desire to help humanity. The desire to help opens the door for misanthropes to cultivate practical wisdom, which is either necessary or necessary and sufficient for the virtues. I have also argued that virtue is open even to affective misanthropes if (but not necessarily only if) their affective stance is one of dislike. Misanthropes, then, are not, *as misanthropes*, barred from being virtuous.

This is good news in a world with so little of it.[6]

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