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The ideal as an inclusive tool. From Kant's aesthetics to contemporary ethical puzzles

1.

Kant is the philosopher who systematizes the philosophical notion of ideal. The first thing to do is to analyze the passages which institute the definition of this notion. Let us start from the clearest passage: the definition of the philosophical notion of ideal given by Kant in the *Critique of the power of judgment*. In the paragraph 17, entitled *Of the ideal of beauty*, Kant starts from the distinction between ideal and idea: "Idea signifies, strictly speaking, a concept of reason, and ideal the representation of an individual being as adequate to an idea" (Kant 1790: 5: 232). The first thing to highlight is that the ideal has an aesthetic matrix (see also Kant 1997a : AA XXV, 529 and Kant 1923: AA XV, 390): talking about the ideal means talking about "the representation", and in particular "the representation of an individual being", i.e. the "individual presentation" (Kant 1790: 5: 232). The aesthetic matrix, which characterizes any ideal, is clearly illustrated by the ideal of beauty: "Hence that archetype of taste, which indeed rests on reason's indeterminate idea of a maximum, but cannot be represented through concepts, but only in an individual presentation, would better be called the

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ideal of the beautiful" (Kant 1790: 5: 232). That is, we have an "indeterminate idea", not illustrated by a representation (for instance the "indeterminate idea of a maximum"), but we also have a tool through which we can represent to ourselves, i.e. determinately show to ourselves, the "indeterminate idea of a maximum" – the tool is the ideal (for instance the ideal of beauty: the representation, i.e. the determinate illustration, of a beautiful human being). Now, the question to be answered is the following: "how do we attain such an ideal of beauty?" (Kant 1790: 5: 232). And "how do we attain" any ideal? Kant articulates his answer by making reference to two operations.

The first operation is the exercise of imagination: talking about the ideal means talking about the "ideal of the imagination, precisely because it does not rest on concepts but on presentation, and the faculty of presentation is the imagination" (Kant 1790: 5: 232). In particular, the exercise of imagination forms an "aesthetic normal idea" (Kant 1790: 5: 233): the imagination can "superimpose one image on another and by means of the congruence of several of the same kind [...] arrive at a mean that can serve them all as a common measure" (Kant 1790: 5: 234. See also Kant 1997b: AA XXV, 1330). Let us try to make an example: first, we see a series of faces (i.e. the series of faces we have seen from the day we were born until today), then, through the exercise of our imagination, we form the face which results from "superimpos[ing] one image on another and by means of the congruence of several of the same kind [...] arriv[ing] at a mean that can serve them all as a common measure". Now, we have the ideal of the beauty of the face, i.e. the ideal face. Kant makes the following example: "if in a similar way there is sought for this average man the average head,

the average nose, etc., then this shape is the basis for the normal idea of the beautiful man in the country where this comparison is made" (Kant 1790: 5: 234). Again, the first step is given by aesthetic experience (i.e. by the aesthetic experience of the human beings of "the country where this comparison is made") and the second step is given by aesthetic imagination.

The second operation is the exercise of reason: talking about the ideal means talking about "some idea of reason" (Kant 1790: 5: 233) which "at its basis there must lie" (Kant 1790: 5: 234) and "determines *a priori* the end on which the internal possibility of the object rests" (Kant 1790: 5: 234). In particular, the exercise of reason, i.e. "the idea of reason" (Kant 1790: 5: 234), makes us draw "a distinction between the normal idea of the beautiful and its ideal" (Kant 1790: 5: 235), i.e. makes us accomplish the formation of the ideal: "the ideal consists in the expression of the moral, without which the object would not please universally and moreover positively" (Kant 1790: 5: 234). The exercise of reason in the formation of the ideal means that the ideal results from "The visible expression of moral ideas" (Kant 1790: 5: 234). Again, Kant illustrates his argument through the ideal of beauty. Following the steps in his argument is instructive. The first operation is the identification of the possible domain of the ideal of beauty: "the beauty for which an idea is to be sought must not be a vague beauty, but must be a beauty fixed by a concept of objective purposiveness, consequently it must not belong to the object of an entirely pure judgment of taste, but rather to one of a partly intellectualized judgment of taste" (Kant 1790: 5: 232-3). The possible domain of the ideal of beauty is special. Surely, it is not the domain of free beauty: "An ideal of beautiful flowers,

of beautiful furnishings, of a beautiful view, cannot be conceived" (Kant 1790: 5: 233). And it is not the domain of dependent beauty: "However, an ideal of a beauty adhering to determinate ends, e.g., of a beautiful residence, a beautiful tree, beautiful gardens, etc., is also incapable of being represented" (Kant 1790: 5: 233). The reason why the domain of the ideal of beauty exceeds the domain of dependent beauty is instructive: when we have to do with dependent beauty, "the ends are not adequately determined and fixed by their concept, and consequently the purposiveness is almost as free as in the case of vague beauty" (Kant 1790: 5: 233). That is, the ideal of beauty seems to require a special dependence, which seems to make the reference to the "ends" more radical. Now, we can precisely identify the possible domain of the ideal of beauty: "Only that which has the end of its existence in itself, the human being, who determines his ends himself through reason, or, where he must derive them from external perception can nevertheless compare them to essential and universal ends and in that case also aesthetically judge their agreement with them: this human being alone is capable of an ideal of beauty" (Kant 1790: 5: 233). The result to which Kant gets is meaningful: the possible domain of the ideal of beauty is exclusive – the ideal of beauty is human, and nothing else. The second operation, which is the identification of the possible domain of the other possible ideals, is founded on the result of the first operation: "this human being alone is capable of an ideal of beauty, just as the humanity in his person, as intelligence, is alone among all the objects in the world capable of the ideal of perfection" (Kant 1790: 5: 233). The ideal is human

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– the ideal tells us something essential about the human being and does something essential for the human being.

2.

If we want to better understand what the essential thing told by the ideal about the human being is and, above all, what the essential thing done by the ideal for the human being is we have to move from 1790 to 1781, i.e. from the *Critique of the power of judgment* to the *Critique of pure reason* (but also to the pre-critical writings, already mentioned in part). Let us start from the passage which best combines the arguments of the first critique with the arguments of the third critique: the aesthetic matrix of the ideal. Kant explains: "Virtue, and with it human wisdom in its entire purity, are ideas. But the sage (of the Stoics) is an ideal, i.e., a human being who exists merely in thoughts, but who is fully congruent with the idea of wisdom" (Kant 1781: A 569/B 597). Again, the distinction between ideal and idea is aesthetic: the former is almost the form of the latter, even if the form is imagined and thought, and cannot overcome the limits of imagination and thought. But what is the function of a form limited to what is imaginable and thinkable ? Kant's answer allows us to better frame the relationship between the ideal and the human being (again, what is the essential thing which the former tells us about the latter? And what is the essential thing which the former does for the latter?): "Thus just as the idea gives the rule, so the ideal in such a case serves as the original image for the thoroughgoing determination of the copy" (Kant 1781: A 569/B 597). The core of Kant's answer is the words "original image". Kant specifies in a further passage: the ideal is "the original image (*prototypon*) of

all things, which all together, as defective copies (*ectypa*), take from it the matter for their possibility" (Kant 1781: A 578/B 606). Talking about "the original image" means talking about the essential tool through which "all things" "take" "the matter for their possibility": the ideal is the condition of possibility "of all things" which are "defective copies" – the ideal is the condition of possibility of the human operations which, in order to be performed, make reference to an "original image". The latter is, in turn, almost the translation of "the rule" given by the idea in a representation, in an illustration, i.e. in an aesthetic form.

Now, we can more precisely analyze the meaning of the relationship between the ideal and the original image. Kant specifies: "we have in us no other standard for our actions than the conduct of this divine human being, with which we can compare ourselves, judging ourselves and thereby improving ourselves" (Kant 1781: A 569/B 597), because the "ideals, even though one may never concede them objective reality (existence), are nevertheless not to be regarded as mere figments of the brain; rather, they provide an indispensable standard for reason, which needs the concept of that which is entirely complete in its kind, in order to assess and measure the degree and the defects of what is incomplete" (Kant 1781: A 569/B 597-A 570/B 598). Then, the ideals "have a practical power (as regulative principles) grounding the possibility of the perfection of certain actions" (Kant 1781: A 569/B 597). We thus get to the answers to our questions: the essential thing which the ideal tells us about the human being has to do with "the conduct of this divine human being" and the essential thing which the ideal does for the human being has to do with the "standard for our actions", and in particular with "compar[ing] our-

selves", i.e. "measur[ing] the degree and the defects of what is incomplete", "and thereby improving ourselves". The meaning of the first answer is that Kant thinks of humankind as incapable of perfection and, at the same time, capable of tending towards perfection. The limit of humankind seems to show its greatest power: we are incapable of performing actions which are perfect, i.e. not perfectionable at least in our imagination, but we are capable of imagining their possible status, i.e. "the conduct of this divine human being". And the meaning of the second answer is that the capacity of tending towards perfection seems to identify humankind, in Kant's terms, as something more than what is incapable of perfection. A human being seems to be, above all, a being who is capable of judging his actions through a criterion which distinguishes imperfection (of the actions which are made) from perfection (of the actions which are unmakeable, but imaginable). And the reason why the capacity of imagining an unmakeable action is essential for humankind is that there is no other tool for "improving ourselves", i.e. for moving from the imperfect action we performed yesterday to the action, still imperfect, but "improv[ed]", we perform today (for instance, yesterday we tried to perform a wise action. Then, we used the imagination of "the sage (of the Stoics)" as a "standard for our action", and in particular for "compar[ing] ourselves", i.e. "measur[ing] the degree and the defects of what is incomplete", "and thereby improving ourselves". The result is that the wise action which we try to perform today is "improv[ed]" compared with the wise action we tried to perform yesterday: the former is still imperfect, but not identical with the latter, because it is, vice versa, its development) – the reason why the capacity of imagining an un-

makeable action is essential for humankind is that there is no other tool for developing our actions: the imagination of the ideal is essential for the development of the real.

The relationship between the ideal and the real is crucial, and needs to be carefully analyzed. The passages of the *Critique of pure reason* which deal with the argument are numerous. Let us start from the genesis of the ideal, i.e. its distinction from the idea: if it is true that "Ideas, however, are still more remote from objective reality than categories" (Kant 1781: A 567/B 595), because "They contain a certain completeness that no possible empirical cognition ever achieves, and with them reason has a systematic unity only in the sense that the empirically possible unity seeks to approach it without ever completely reaching it" (Kant 1781: A 567/B 595-A 568/B 596), it is also true that "something that seems to be even further removed from objective reality than the idea is what I call the ideal, by which I understand the idea not merely *in concreto* but *in individuo*, i.e. as an individual thing which is determinable, or even determined, through the idea alone" (Kant 1781: A 568/B 596). The relationship between the ideal and the real is founded on their radical distance: the ideal arises from a further articulation of the idea (from "the idea not merely *in concreto* but *in individuo*", i.e. in an aesthetic form, which is "individual", "determinable, or even determined", but "through the idea alone"), and talking about a further articulation of the idea means talking about a further distance from the real. As for the "divine human being", Kant thinks that "we can never reach the standard" (Kant 1781: A 569/B 597) and, as for the "defective copies (*ectypa*)", Kant thinks that, by making reference to the ideal, "although they approach more or less nearly to it, they

always fall infinitely short of reaching it" (Kant 1781: A 578/B 606). Finally, Kant more incisively argues: "to try to realize the ideal in an example, i.e., in appearance, such as that of the sage in a novel, is not feasible, and even has about it something nonsensical and not very edifying, since the natural limits which constantly impair the completeness in the idea render impossible every illusion in such an attempt, and thereby render even what is good in the idea suspect by making it similar to a mere fiction" (Kant 1781: A 570/B 598). Before carefully analyzing the possible meaning of Kant's argument, we need to highlight the presence of an analogous position also in the pre-critical writings: in particular, the ideals can be essential tools of judgment even if they are unreachable (see Kant 1997a : AA XXV, 530), and their unreachability is defined also through the Latin word "*fictiones*" (see Kant 1934: AA XIX, 108)[1], which highlights their status of formations of imagination and thought, and nothing else. Finally, and above all, the constant genetic reference of Kant's notion of ideal is Plato's notion of idea, which means an even more absolute distance between the ideal dimension in general and the real dimension in general (see Kant 1910: § 9), because the perfection which characterizes the former, and which is compared with God's perfection, is meant to be extraneous to the latter.

[1] The passage is the following: "Ideal ist die Vorstellung eines Gegenstandes der Sinne conform einer idee und der intellectuellen Vollkommenheit in Ihr. Ideale gehen nur auf Gegenstände des Verstandes und sind nur bey Menschen und an denselben *fictiones*. Es ist eine Erdichtung, um eine idee in der Anschauung *in concreto* zu setzen".

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3.

But what does it precisely mean to found the relationship between the ideal and the real on their radical distance? And what does it precisely mean to argue for the radicality of their distance through the aforementioned warning ("to try to realize the ideal in an example, i.e., in appearance, such as that of the sage in a novel, is not feasible, and even has about it something nonsensical and not very edifying, since the natural limits which constantly impair the completeness in the idea render impossible every illusion in such an attempt, and thereby render even what is good in the idea suspect by making it similar to a mere fiction")? Kant distinguishes two issues: the former is that the ideal is constitutively unfeasible ("not feasible", "impossible", an "illusion") and the latter is that, even if the ideal were not constitutively unfeasible, its feasibility would not be desirable anyway (it would be "something nonsensical and not very edifying", it would "render even what is good in the idea suspect"). Then, the unfeasibility of the ideal seems essential. Why? Let us try to question Kant's argument through an example. Let us suppose that one of the ideals mentioned by Kant, i.e. the ideal of "the sage (of the Stoics)", is thought to be feasible. In particular, let us suppose that the ideal of "the sage (of the Stoics)" is thought to be feasible by us. Our will seems desirable: we want to embody a positive ideal, and the embodiment of a positive ideal seems desirable both for those who realize it (for us, who will soon be wise) and for those who live with those who realize it (for the human beings who live in our society, who will soon have both wise human beings with whom to interact and examples of wisdom to follow). But, if we more carefully analyze our hypothesis, we highlight at least

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two practical dangers, which are the two consequences of the theoretical mistake in Kant's argument.

The first danger is to attribute too much power to our object (which is wisdom, here). If we substitute the word "wisdom" (to which we usually give a positive meaning) with the word "stupidity" (to which we usually give a negative meaning), the result of our will is an action aimed at embodying stupidity, and this embodiment entails that, for those who live with us, there are stupid human beings with whom to interact and examples of stupidity to follow. And we cannot commit ourselves to the argument that we should, first, distinguish the positive ideals from the negative ideals and, then, try to realize the former, but not the latter, because the aforementioned argument cannot protect us from two critical risks, which are the risk of being mistaken about the distinction between the former and the latter and the risk that it is not possible to distinguish the former from the latter at all. Furthermore, attributing too much power to any object of ours is dangerous because it means to universalize, i.e. to absolutize, a particular: thinking that a particular ideal is feasible by us, and even that to embody it is the desirable result of our will, means attributing too much power, finally, and above all, to our actions. In their realization, these actions are then authorized to get to violent extremes, which violate both the space at disposal of the existence (imagined, and not realized) of other ideals and the space at disposal of the existence of human beings (of us, who submit ourselves to something which is "not feasible", "impossible", an "illusion", and who destine ourselves to the violence which characterizes unfeasible things, and those who live with us to a violence which is not chosen, but just suffered).

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The second risk is to attribute not enough power to our object (which is wisdom, here). Let us go back to Kant's words, who writes that "to try to realize the ideal" "render[s] even what is good in the idea suspect by making it similar to a mere fiction". We can try to prudently answer the question about their possible meaning as follows (Kant does not explain): the failed realization of the ideal can make us think that the dimension of ideality lacks an actual value for us. To put it with Kant's words: we can think that "what is good in the idea" from which the articulation of the ideal arises is "even" "suspect" and "similar to a mere fiction". Through an example: the failed realization of the sage can make us think that "what is good in" wisdom is "even" "suspect" and "similar to a mere fiction", i.e. that both the idea of wisdom and the ideal of the sage lack an actual value for us. Here, the essential question is about the possible meaning of what is unfeasible (see also Rescher 1987 and Emmett 1994). First, let us imagine an ideal (which does not seem complicated: the "aesthetic normal idea" is an almost automatic result of our imagination). But, then, when we exercise our reason, the use of the ideal seems complicated, requiring the capacities, not automatic, of "compar[ing] ourselves, judging ourselves and thereby improving ourselves". *Pro quo*, if we have to do with something which is unfeasible anyway? That is, why should we commit ourselves to "compare ourselves, [to] judg[e] ourselves and thereby improv[e] ourselves" if the ideal, i.e. the object which directs our operations, is unfeasible anyway (if we cannot be wise anyway)? The answer we obtain from an overview of Kant's work on the notion of ideal is that the reason why what is unfeasible makes sense is that it is not an objective, but a tool – the ideal makes sense because,

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by being unfeasible, it drives us to an inextinguishable commitment, and is thus one of the most powerful tools we have to realize other objectives. The objective we realize when we use the ideal of the wise is not that we come to embody this ideal, but that we foster the inextinguishable development of our actions through the likewise inextinguishable development of our capacities of "compar[ing] ourselves, judging ourselves and thereby improving ourselves". What founds the inextinguishability, essential for us, of the development of both our theoretical activities, first, and our practical activities, then, is the unfeasibility of the ideal, and nothing else: our development can continue because the ideal cannot be realized, i.e. because it cannot extinguish its power of driving forward both our capacities of "compar[ing] ourselves, judging ourselves and thereby improving ourselves" and our actions.

4.

Believing that the ideal is a tool, and not an objective, of ours, is one of the cornerstones of the modern invention of the notion of ideal through Kant's philosophical work. But, around the instrumental definition of the notion of ideal, there are other essential elements. In particular, we can identify four cardinal arguments:

1. a mechanism we may compare with abstraction;
2. a result we may compare with the notion of *mediocritas*;
3. a meaningful relationship between the aesthetic dimension and the ethical dimension;
4. dualism (and the relationship with Plato's philosophical work).

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Let us start from the first argument: a mechanism we may compare with abstraction. The operation through which our imagination can "superimpose one image on another and by means of the congruence of several of the same kind [...] arrive at a mean that can serve them all as a common measure" may be compared with the abstraction of a universal from a series of particulars. Then, the formation of the ideal is founded on a mechanism which is possible for any human being: talking about an ideal does not mean talking about an aristocratic tool – the ideal is democratic, in the sense that it is at the disposal of any human being as a "standard for our actions". But the possible comparison between the mechanism of formation of the ideal and abstraction highlights another interesting issue: the universality of the ideal does not mean at all that it is identical for any human being. Kant's example is clear: if we want to define the ideal of male beauty we have to consider "the country where this comparison is made". That is, the search for "the average head", "the average nose, etc.", and, finally, the "average man", is relative, and not absolute. Then, defining the ideal of male beauty means defining a series of different ideals: in particular, a number of ideals identical with the number of "the countr[ies] where this comparison is made".

To combine the universality of the ideal with a possible relativity, and, finally, a possible difference, is one of the most interesting results of Kant's philosophical work on the notion of ideal, work from which we can learn an important lesson – the status of universality of Kant's ideal can teach us that universalizing does not necessarily mean absolutizing. I can have a universal, for instance a "standard for" all my "actions", and, at the same time, I can believe that it is not absolute, i.e. the "stand-

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ard for" all human beings' "actions", which, then, I can respect even if they are most different from my actions. Kant's philosophical work on the notion of ideal also teaches us an important lesson about the conditions of possibility of human respect. This respect seems to result from a relativity which can mean a presence of different ideals (you and I have two different ideals of wisdom: you use yours and, at the same time, respect mine and I use mine and, at the same time, respect yours), and not from a relativism which can mean an absence of ideals (you and I do not have an ideal of wisdom, because we think that its being relative to a given "country" means the negation of its universality, which we confuse with its absoluteness). Vice versa, universality and absoluteness can be two distinct things: I can abstract a universal from a series of particulars, and have a tool which, even if it is essential for me, I do not absolutize through its extension to other human beings.

Let us continue with the second argument: a result we may compare with the notion of *mediocritas*. Kant's ideal makes reference to "a mean" obtained "by means of the congruence of several [images] of the same kind" (for instance an "average head", an "average nose, etc.", and, finally, an "average man", who "is the basis for the normal idea of the beautiful man"). The pre-critical writings highlight an analogous argument: "From where do we get this ideal? Since we have seen various human beings of different sizes, the impressions do indeed vanish, but they do so in such a way that they converge and there remains with us a certain average that we take to be the true proper size and in accordance with which we judge all others" (see Kant 1997b: AA XXV, 1330). We may compare Kant's ideal with the *mediocritas* in the sense that the "aesthet-

ic normal idea", which, together with the "idea of reason", founds the ideal, seems to make a literal reference to the "measure", to the "middle way": the "average man" seems *mediocris*, i.e., literally, "staying in the middle way, between what is little and what is big". The possible comparison between Kant's ideal and the *mediocritas* leads to a meaningful result, which we may summarize as follows: the ideal is an inclusive, and not exclusive, tool, because it makes reference to a "measure", to a "middle way" which result also from the consideration of differences. These differences are most extreme, most distant from the ideal which, finally, is formed – the ideal includes, and does not exclude, the most extreme differences, because also the latter work on the formation of the former. Let us go back to the initial example. First, we see a series of faces (i.e. the series of faces we have seen from the day we were born until today). Let us specify further: in the series of faces there are real faces we would define as regular (for instance 90%) and real faces we would define as irregular (for instance 10%). Then, through the exercise of our imagination, we form the face which results from "superimpos[ing] one image on another and by means of the congruence of several of the same kind [...] arriv[ing] at a mean that can serve them all as a common measure". Now, we have the ideal of the beauty of the face, i.e. the ideal face, "with which we can compare ourselves, judging ourselves and thereby improving ourselves". We are likely to say that the regular faces are partially normal (for instance 70%) and partially beautiful (for instance 20%): the former, "compare[d]" with the ideal face, are quite distant, but not too distant, from their ideal and the latter, "compare[d]" with the ideal face, are hardly distant from their ideal.

And we are likely to say that the irregular faces are ugly: their distance from the ideal face is extreme, sometimes because of too short a forehead, sometimes because of too little eyes, sometimes because of too big a nose etc., i.e. because of facial elements too different from their ideal. Should we think, then, that the ideal face, used as a tool through which "we can compare", "judging", means that the real faces we would define as irregular, i.e. ugly, are extraneous to the dimension of ideality? The answer is negative. Saying, together with Kant, that the ideal makes reference to "a mean" obtained "by means of the congruence of several [images] of the same kind" means saying that any real face works on the formation of the ideal face – again, the ideal is an inclusive, and not exclusive, tool, because it includes, and does not exclude, the most extreme differences.

The result of the possible comparison between Kant's ideal and the notion of *mediocritas* is meaningful because it has remarkable consequences both in aesthetics and in ethics. Let us try to illustrate the former. Vice versa, we will go back to the latter later. Let us suppose that the female ideal of beauty of "the country where this comparison is made" is A. And let us suppose that the real women D, E, F, G, H, I and L, who are quite distant, but not too distant, from A, are considered normal, the real women B and C, who are hardly distant from A, are considered beautiful and the real woman M, who is extremely distant from A, is considered ugly. The truth is that A is the tool through which it is possible to believe that M's ugliness is a difference which means identitarian specificity, and not identitarian alienation. That is, A, which results also from M, is the tool through which it is possible to believe that M's ugliness means that M is to be considered a specific identity of

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"the country where this comparison is made", in which she legitimately and constructively takes part, and not that M is to be considered an identity alienated from "the country where this comparison is made", in which she illegitimately and destructively takes part. It is also because of M that A has the status it has (and it is also because of M that D, E, F, G, H, I and L are considered normal and B and C are considered beautiful). Again, ugliness, i.e. an ontological dimension (which is aesthetic, here) which is characterized by extreme distance and difference from its ideal, is included (and respected), and not excluded (and not respected), through the ideal – the truth is that the ideal acts *pro*, and not *contra*, the real, any real.

Fig. 1 aims at giving a possible image of the above-developed argument: the ideal (the external perimeter) gives the possibility of including all the parts, both central (the internal white circle), mid-central (the grey area) and peripheral (the black area), parts which actually work together on its formation.

Fig. 2 aims at giving a possible image of the above-developed argument when we shift from aesthetics to ethics, a shift which we will develop later. For now, it is sufficient to try to suppose a series of substitutions starting from a series of possible analogies: "good actions" instead of "beautiful faces", "normal actions" instead of "normal faces" and "bad actions" instead of "ugly faces". The question is the following: can we use the ideal as an inclusive, and not exclusive, tool also in ethics? In particular, can we use the ideal as an inclusive, and not exclusive, tool when we legislate on our actions, i.e. when we decree what possible actions of ours are legitimate and what possible actions of ours are illegitimate? What would happen, for instance, if we substituted "beautiful faces" with "saving a

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human being", "normal faces" with "not saving and not killing a human being" and "ugly faces" with "killing a human being"? And what would happen, for instance, if we substitute "beautiful faces" with "*contra* euthanasia", "normal faces" with "*contra* active euthanasia and *pro* passive euthanasia" and "ugly faces" with "*pro* euthanasia"? We will argue below for the possible analogy between aesthetics and ethics (in particular, between the ideal used as a "standard" to judge the former and the ideal used as a "standard" to judge the latter). And, finally, we will try to answer the aforementioned questions.

For now, let us continue with the third argument: a meaningful relationship between the aesthetic dimension and the ethical dimension, which, not by chance, starts being remarkably highlighted. Uniting the "aesthetic normal idea" with the "idea of reason" in forming the ideal means believing that the ideal is, above all, an ethical tool, in the sense that its aestheticity is, anyway, "the expression of the moral", "The visible expression of moral ideas". Then, the ideal is, above all, the tool through which the human being, who is the only one "among all the objects in the world" to have "the end of [his] existence in [him]self" and to "determine" "his ends himself through reason", judges "the possibility of the perfection of certain actions". Any ideal is, at once, aesthetic and ethical – any ideal is the (aesthetic) form of an (ethical) idea. The objective of Kant's philosophical work on the notion of ideal is to give a further tool (a powerful further tool) to the human being who wants to "compare", "judg[e]" "and thereby improv[e]" his actions, and in particular "the moral" of his actions.

Finally, let us go back to the cardinal argument we have already developed in part through the discussion of the instru-

mental definition of the notion of ideal: dualism (and the relationship with Plato's philosophical work). Kant's constant reference to Plato, starting from the pre-critical writings, means at least two important things: the first has to do with the genesis of the ideal from the idea (and the reference to Plato seems necessary) and the second has to do with the dualistic relationship of the ideal with the real (and the reference to Plato does not seem necessary, but chosen). Kant's choice seems to have, then, an important meaning. Kant seems to attribute to the ideal a dualistic relationship with the real analogous to the rigorous dualism which Plato attributes to the relationship of the idea with the real. The most meaningful consequence seems to be the following: if it is true that Plato's idea can act as a model of perfection for the real also, and above all, through its unreachability, i.e. its dualistic relationship with the real, it is also true that Kant's ideal can act as an "original image (*prototypon*)" "of perfection" for "all things" "as defective copies (*ectypa*)" also, and above all, through its unreachability, i.e. its dualistic relationship with "all things" "as defective copies (*ectypa*)". The dualistic relationship of the ideal with the real seems to guarantee both the continuation of the perfection of the former and, and above all, the continuation of the possibility of the latter of having an inextinguishable model of perfection: the real can have an inextinguishable model of perfection, i.e. a likewise inextinguishable powerful tool of development of itself, in any circumstance of its existence. Then, the dualistic relationship of the ideal with the real seems to have the objective of taking care of the latter, and not of the former: the ideal does not seem essential in itself, and does not seem essential *contra* the real – vice versa, the ideal seems essential *pro* the real.

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5.

Now, let us go back to fig. 1 and fig. 2, which we designed starting from Kant's "aesthetic normal idea". But let us try to exceed the domain of Kant's ideals, which have to do with the human being, and nothing else. Fig. 1 represents Kant's "aesthetic normal idea": the ideal (the external perimeter) gives the possibility of including all the parts, both central (the internal white circle, i.e. the "beautiful faces"), mid-central (the grey area, i.e. the "normal faces") and peripheral (the black area, i.e. the "ugly faces"), parts which actually work together on its formation. Fig. 2 represents the application of Kant's "aesthetic normal idea" to ethics. The question is the following: what may the ethical *mediocritas* be? That is, if the aesthetic *mediocritas* is "superimpos[ing] one image on another and by means of the congruence of several of the same kind [...] arriv[ing] at a mean that can serve them all as a common measure", in the sense that, "if in a similar way there is sought for this average man the average head, the average nose, etc., then this shape is the basis for the normal idea of the beautiful man in the country where this comparison is made", then what may the ethical *mediocritas* be? Let us try to make two examples. The first example is aesthetic: "in the country where this comparison is made" we have a high percentage of black eyes, a high percentage of brown eyes, a low percentage of blue eyes and a low percentage of green eyes. It is likely that the ideal eyes imagined by the inhabitants of "the country where this comparison is made" are dark brown. And it is likely that, if we ask a draftsman to represent a human being in whom all the inhabitants of "the country where this comparison is made" are recognizable, then the eyes of the represented human being

would be dark brown. The second example is ethical: "in the country where this comparison is made" we have a high percentage of Catholic inhabitants, a high percentage of Protestant inhabitants, a low percentage of Jewish inhabitants and a low percentage of Muslim inhabitants. Here, what may it mean to imagine the ideal religion of the inhabitants of "the country where this comparison is made"? And, here, what may it mean to represent a religion in which all the inhabitants of "the country where this comparison is made" are recognizable? The second question has to do, for instance, with the debates about the presence of religious symbols inside the school buildings: should we hang something, and what, on the walls of the school buildings attended by students of different religions? Again, the question is the following: what may the ethical *mediocritas* be?

If it is true that talking about the notion of *mediocritas* means talking about the use of the ideal as an inclusive, and not exclusive, tool, it is also true that we may answer that we should hang something on the walls of the school buildings attended by students of different religions: in particular, we should hang all their religious symbols. The *mediocritas* means both that the ideal does not have to exclude the minority (the presence of a high percentage of Christian inhabitants does not have to make us choose to hang Christian, but not Jewish and Muslim, religious symbols) and that the ideal does not have to exclude the majority (the presence of a low percentage of Jewish and Muslim inhabitants does not have to make us choose not to hang religious symbols at all, i.e. to make us think that the exclusion of all the parts guarantees the respect of any part) – vice versa, the *mediocritas* of the ideal means

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that we have to include: it is the inclusion of all the parts that guarantees the respect of any part.

The ethical *mediocritas* is, anyway, complicated, as we continue to discover if we go back to the questions to be answered. Let us try to discuss how we may answer. The example of religions tells us that the use of the ideal as a "standard" to judge the ethical dimension is more complicated than the use of the ideal as a "standard" to judge the aesthetic dimension because the latter can correspond to an average, i.e. inclusive, image in a sense extraneous to the former (in aesthetics we can represent the ideal eyes through an inclusive average, in ethics we cannot represent the ideal religion through an inclusive average). But there is a sense in which also the ideal used as a "standard" to judge the ethical dimension can correspond to an inclusive average image – the ethical ideal can correspond to an inclusive average image if it is a sort of meta-ideal, i.e. the tool we use to legislate on ethics. We cannot represent the ideal religion through an inclusive average (we cannot, here, "superimpose one image on another and by means of the congruence of several of the same kind [...] arrive at a mean that can serve them all as a common measure", in the sense that we cannot, here, search "for this average [religion] the average [God]"). We can, however, abstract as follows: if we have Catholics, Protestants, Jews and Muslims we can abstract a sort of meta-ideal, according to which, once again, the inclusion of all the parts (of all the religions and their ideals) is what guarantees the respect of any part (of any religion and its ideals) – we can get to an inclusive average through the abstraction of a sort of meta-ideal according to which, when we legis-

late on ethics, and in particular on religious ethics, our "standard" to judge legitimates all religions and their ideals.

The result we get is then the following: when we legislate on ethics, the ideal, and in particular the meta-ideal, can be essential to us – and its use means a remarkable reduction of legislative invasiveness. If we believe that the *mediocritas* of the ideal is important especially because it acts as a tool which includes the differences, then the legislative use of the ideal, and in particular of the meta-ideal, means writing "light" laws – writing laws which, through the remarkable reduction of their invasiveness, include all the different parts and their different ideals.

Let us try to verify our result through the questions to be answered. Let us start from the first two questions: what would happen if we substitute "beautiful faces" with "good actions", "normal faces" with "normal actions" and "ugly faces" with "bad actions"? And what would happen if we substitute "beautiful faces" with "saving a human being", "normal faces" with "not saving and not killing a human being" and "ugly faces" with "killing a human being"? The first two questions seem to put our result in a critical position: it does not seem possible, here, to use the argued meta-ideal, which, through the writing of "light" laws, includes all the different parts and their different ideals, i.e. also "bad actions" and "killing a human being". But the failure of our result is instructive, as it helps us to better understand the meaning of the argued meta-ideal. If we consider the first question, the use of the argued meta-ideal does not seem to make sense: we cannot think it makes sense to include something we define as "bad actions" through a "light" law which does not invade the possibility of their existence. But, if we consider the second question, something seems

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to change, even if quite paradoxically: there are cases in which we can think it makes sense to include something we define as "killing a human being". The mentioned cases are "self-defense" and "killing in war": through "light" laws, our government does not invade the possibility of their existence. Then, we better understand the meaning of the argued meta-ideal because we better understand its practicability: there is a limit which distinguishes what is legal from what is illegal, and which seems to be founded on the degree of invasion a human being is submitted to. That is, if a human being is submitted to a high-degree invasion (to an invasion which entails his death), then the meta-ideal includes "killing a human being", i.e. founds "light" laws, which do not invade its possibility of existence, and which legalize "self-defense" and "killing in war". Vice versa, the meta-ideal is not practicable: if a human being is submitted to a low-degree invasion (to an invasion which does not entail his death), then "killing a human being" is excluded, and not included, by "heavy", and not "light", laws, which invade its possibility of existence. We may say that the meta-ideal is not practicable if the inclusion of the differences means that a human being is submitted to a high-degree invasion – and we may say that the meta-ideal should be practicable in all the other cases: we should try to legislate through the inclusion of the differences in all the cases in which a human being is not submitted to a high-degree invasion.

But when is a human being not submitted to a high-degree invasion? That is, when should we use the meta-ideal as a tool which includes the differences through the writing of "light" laws? The question is crucial and, at the same time, very complicated. Here, we can try to start our reasoning from our work

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on the notion of ideal. Let us continue with the third question: what would happen if we substitute "beautiful faces" with "*contra* euthanasia", "normal faces" with "*contra* active euthanasia and *pro* passive euthanasia" and "ugly faces" with "*pro* euthanasia"? The first reflection to make is that our substitution supposes a situation analogous to the European situation: a low percentage of European countries is "*contra* euthanasia", a high percentage of European countries is "*contra* active euthanasia and *pro* passive euthanasia" and a low percentage of European countries is "*pro* euthanasia". The second reflection to make is philosophical, and answers a question about what would happen if we chose to use the meta-ideal according to which it is the inclusion of all the parts and their ideals that guarantees the respect of any part and its ideals. Including all the parts and their ideals means legislating through the writing of "light" laws which have a result analogous to the result we proposed in the case of the religious symbols inside the school buildings:

1. using the inclusive meta-ideal means that we do not have to exclude the minority (in the case of the religious symbols inside the school buildings, we do not have to exclude Jewish and Muslim religious symbols and, in the case of euthanasia, we do not have to exclude the choices "*contra* euthanasia" and "*pro* euthanasia");
2. using the inclusive meta-ideal means that we do not have to exclude the majority (in the case of the religious symbols inside the school buildings, we do not have to exclude Catholic and Protestant religious symbols, together with Jewish and Muslim religious symbols, and, in the case of euthanasia, we do not have to exclude the choice "*contra* active euthanasia

and *pro* passive euthanasia", together with the choices "*contra* euthanasia" and "*pro* euthanasia". That is, we do not have not to legislate at all);

3. then, using the inclusive meta-ideal means that we have to legitimate all the parts and their ideals: in the first case, we have to hang all the religious symbols and, in the second case, we have to legislate through the writing of "light" laws which guarantee the respect of any part and its ideals.

Using the inclusive meta-ideal means giving the single citizen the possibility (and the responsibility) of choosing for himself – using the meta-ideal means that the single citizen is committed both to what he needs to do with himself and to the ideal on which to found the answer to the question about what to do with himself.

But our question comes back: when is a human being not submitted to a high-degree invasion? That is, is there the danger that our result means that a human being, in a country which authorizes all the parts and their ideals about euthanasia, can be submitted to high-degree invasion? The answer is negative, in the sense that the possible danger is to be removed through careful legislative work, which needs to focus on the objective of guaranteeing those who choose for themselves, and not others (relatives, doctors etc.). But removing the aforementioned possible danger does not entail giving up the inclusion of the differences in the cases in which the high-degree invasion human beings are submitted to is chosen by themselves for themselves and does not directly invade the choices of other human beings. Then, the government asymptotic to the ideal government legislates through the meta-ideal according to which the citizen X, directed by the ideal $I_{(X)}$, can

choose by himself for himself to be "*contra* euthanasia" (which, then, he will not be submitted to), the citizen Y, directed by the ideal $I_{(Y)}$, can choose by himself for himself to be "*contra* active euthanasia and *pro* passive euthanasia" (then, he can be submitted to the latter, but he cannot be submitted to the former) and the citizen Z, directed by the ideal $I_{(Z)}$, can choose by himself for himself to be "*pro* euthanasia" (which, then, he can be submitted to both when it is passive and when it is active). And the doctors X, Y and Z have an analogous destiny: the doctor X, directed by the ideal $I_{(X)}$, will not practice euthanasia, the doctor Y, directed by the ideal $I_{(Y)}$, can practice passive euthanasia, but will not practice active euthanasia, and the doctor Z, directed by the ideal $I_{(Z)}$, can practice both passive euthanasia and active euthanasia.

The case of euthanasia seems to clarify what means to use the ideal, and in particular the meta-ideal, in ethics. But we can add a final reflection which frames what happens when a human being is not submitted to a high-degree invasion, i.e. a reflection which frames when the meta-ideal should be practicable, when we should try to legislate through the inclusion of the differences. We may say that a human being is not submitted to a high-degree invasion when his destiny, even irreversible, irremediable, is chosen by himself for himself and does not directly invade the choices of other human beings. Then, a "bad action" which is, for instance, a suicide is not to be counter-legislated, because, even if it is irreversible, irremediable, it is chosen by the citizen for himself and does not directly invade the choices of other human beings. That is, the action directly invades the existence of other human beings, for instance the existence of the suicide victim's relatives, but it does

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not directly invade the possibility of other human beings of choosing by themselves for themselves both what to do with themselves (to commit suicide? Not to commit suicide?) and the ideal on which to found the answer to the question about what to do with themselves (to have a Stoic ideal, which authorizes suicide? To have a Christian ideal, which does not authorize suicide?). We may say that the meta-ideal should be practicable when, even if we directly invade the existence of other human beings, we do not directly invade their possibility of choosing by themselves for themselves both what to do with themselves and the ideal on which to found the answer to the question about what to do with themselves – we may say that we should try to legislate through the inclusion of the differences when, even if we directly invade the existence of another human being, we do not directly invade his possibility of choosing by himself for himself.

The argued distinction seems to identify the limit which distinguishes a totalitarian view, an anarchic view and a liberal view:

1. in the case of a totalitarian view, the degree of legislative invasiveness is the highest: too frequently, the law makes us directly invade both the existence of other human beings and their possibility of choosing by themselves for themselves (for instance, the law tells us that a sole way of judging suicide is authorizable);
2. in the case of an anarchic view, the degree of legislative invasiveness is the lowest: too frequently, the law makes us ignore both other human beings' existence and choices, which we do not compare with our choices, i.e. which we do not allow to act as possibilities of improvement of our choices (for

instance, the law does not tell us anything about the way of judging suicide);

3. in the case of a liberal view, the degree of legislative invasiveness is (should be) low when we directly invade the existence of other human beings and high when we directly invade their possibility of choosing by themselves for themselves. For instance, the law tells us that any way of judging suicide is authorizable. Then, the citizen X chooses the Stoic way of judging suicide, which commits, and the citizen Y chooses the Christian way of judging suicide, which does not commit. There is a sense in which their choices and actions invade the existence of other human beings (for instance, the citizen X, who commits suicide, makes unhappy the human beings A and B, who are his friends, and makes happy the human beings C and D, who are his enemies, and the citizen Y, who does not commit suicide, makes happy the human beings A and B, who are his friends, and makes unhappy the human beings C and D, who are his enemies). But there is not a sense in which their choices and actions invade the possibility of other human beings of choosing by themselves for themselves (for instance, A and B, friends of the citizen X, who commits suicide, can anyway choose by themselves for themselves not to commit suicide, i.e. what to do with their own lives, and C and D, enemies of the citizen Y, who does not commit suicide, can anyway choose by themselves for themselves to commit suicide, i.e. what to do with their own lives).

Then, choosing the inclusive meta-ideal when we legislate on ethics means choosing a liberal view according to which the thing we have to work on is, above all, guaranteeing the possibility of choosing – we cannot avoid invading the existence of

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other human beings, but we can avoid invading their possibility of choosing in all the cases in which their choices, and their consequent actions, do not mean a high-degree invasion of our possibility of choosing what to do with our own lives (and Kant's notion of ideal is likely to be one of the most promising starting points at our disposal).

Fig. 1

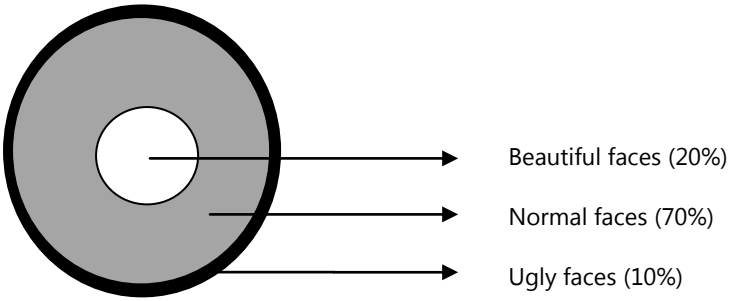
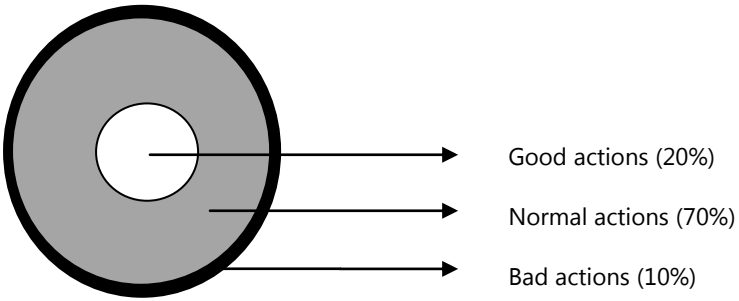


Fig. 2



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