A Philosophical Examination of the Ethical Foundations of the Commons

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the ethical background of the commons and peer-to-peer networks from a philosophical perspective. Despite discussing issues related to the governance of things and people, justice, political organization, and connectedness within communities, the commons literature barely refers to the ethics that derive from peer-to-peer practices and research. A certain philosophical background can be located in the work of some commons scholars, but they refer either to ontological, political, or epistemological dimensions of commoning. Some scholars tend to hint at the ethical principles of the commons without delving deeply into this issue philosophically. In this paper, I approach the commons in terms of Ethics. The main aim is to provide an ethical framework for commoning and peer-to-peer networks based on philosophical concepts. Several ethical pathways are connected with commons practices and research, providing multiple possibilities for a future Ethics of the commons to surface.

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INTRODUCTION

The commons and peer production literature has grown over the years, covering several aspects of this newly born political approach. The commons are being studied in regard to their political frameworks (Söderberg, 2008; Mason, 2015; Kioupkiolis, 2017; Papadimitropoulos, 2017), their economic alternatives (Ostrom, 1990; Benkler, 2006; Rifkin, 2014; Scholz, 2016), their environmental challenges (Kallis et al., 2018; Hickel and Kallis, 2019), their technological and innovation dimensions (Giotitsas, 2019; Pantazis and Meyer, 2020; Kostakis et al., 2023), and their urban variations (Mattei and Quarta, 2015; Foster and Iaione, 2016; Stavrides, 2016; Perperidis, 2023).

Despite discussing issues related to the governance of things and people, justice, political organization, and connectedness within communities, scholars within the commons barely (if ever) refer to the ethics that derive from peer-to-peer practices and research. Traces of a philosophical background can be found in the work of David Bollier (2014) and Bollier and Silke Helfrich (2019), but they refer either to ontological, political, or epistemological dimensions of commoning, while ethical implementations are absent. Scholars tend to hint at the ethical principles of the commons without, nevertheless, deepening this issue philosophically (Papadimitropoulos, 2022).

Certain articles can be found that pose ethical dilemmas in the context of the commons, but they mainly focus on the "tragedy of the commons" written by Garrett Hardin (1968). I am referring here to the "Mapping Concepts and Issues in the Ethics of the Commons: Introduction to the Special Issue" (2020) (both this specific introductory article and the articles contained in this special issue), which does not cover a philosophical analysis of the ethical assumptions of the commons. Instead, it turns to more political, organizational, managerial, and economic dimensions of the commons, focusing on the entrepreneurial aspects of commoning. Another article is that of Baylor Johnson (2003), which again does not delve into the crucial literature of the commons but focuses on some ethical assumptions regarding Hardin's article. Lastly, I am referring to Vicente Moreno-Casas and Philipp Bagus's article (2021). Their focus on the ethics of care is significant, and its relation to the "tragedy of the commons" is innovative, but they don't seem to develop a certain ethics in regards to commoning and peer production. They address and resolve some of the challenges posed by Hardin's article, but they too do not delve into commons-based peer production literature nor do they deploy a philosophical/ethical language or concepts to evaluate the commons.

In this essay, I approach the commons in terms of Ethics. The main aim of this article is to provide an ethical framework for commoning and peer-to-peer networks based on philosophical concepts and aspects. I need to clarify that I am not going to refer to the political and moral dimensions of the "common good", which is the typical way to approach the commons, as I showed before. Rather, I will attempt to develop such a framework first by evaluating the ethical assumptions nested within commons practices and concepts and then by proposing ethical theories and approaches that could be connected with each commons dimension (parts 1–4). In part 5, I outline a more systematic ethical approach for the commons, based on the theories of Immanuel Kant and Aristotle.

Many issues that are being interpreted as mere political, legal, or economic aspects within the commons literature cloak specific ethical assumptions; hence, the need to disclose and place them together in a broader ethical context. Part one attempts to reveal the ethical assumptions hidden behind the political alternatives proposed by the commons. Part two analyzes the ethics of urban commons, while part three elaborates on the environmental ethical values proposed by energy commons. Lastly, part four delves into the digital commons and makerspaces, attempting to disclose ethical assumptions regarding collective technological innovation.

In part five, I attempt to propose a more systematic ethical framework for the commons by referring to philosophers such as Aristotle and Immanuel Kant. Choosing these two philosophers was not random. Kant and Aristotle introduce two of the three most important ethical approaches of Western philosophy: deontology and virtue ethics (the third is consequentialism, which I argue does not suit the commons). The ultimate goal of the paper is to outline ethical theories that can constitute an Ethics of the commons, thus acting as a road-sign for future research on the topic. My reference to multiple such theories throughout the paper reflects this goal.

CAN AN ETHICAL BACKGROUND BE FOUND IN THE POLITICS OF THE COMMONS?

The most fundamental element of the political dimension of the commons is its opposition to neoliberal political notions, such as that of the sole individual and property (Dardot and Laval, 2014; Dean, 2009; De Angelis, 2017; Gibson and Graham, 2006; Hardt and Negri, 2000; Kioupkiolis, 2019). Philosophically, this opposition aims to critique the political and anthropological values established in the early days of modernity by thinkers like Thomas Hobbes (2011). The most crucial aspect of modern society challenged by the commons is individualism. The differentiation of every

dimension of life within modernity, intensified through capitalism, has resulted in individuals being isolated from one another, each pursuing their own survival and prosperity. The ontological foundations of modernity rest on such assumptions, influencing anthropology, politics, and ethics (Bollier and Helfrich, 2019: 37).

The commons introduce a "new window to see the world" or, in other words, an "ontoshift" (Bollier and Helfrich, 2019: 32–33). This means that it challenges the ontological foundations of modernity in terms of individualization and individual property. What matters for the commons are political values such as conviviality, communion, communication, peer governance, and reciprocity (Bollier, 2014). Moreover, such values have introduced several innovative ways of being within a community, ranging from new organizational structures such as commons-based peer production (Bauwens, 2005; Bauwens et al., 2019) to new socio-economic models such as "cosmolocalism" (Kostakis et al., 2015a; Papadimitropoulos, 2023). These structures and models imply that individuals are not separated from one another, but they can team up and form a commons in relation to certain finite resources. Furthermore, these structures imply different economic transactions between peers aiming at communion and mutual survival in contradiction to individualistic prosperity (Ostrom, 1990; Kostakis and Bauwens, 2014).

It is clear by now that for commons practices and initiatives, what matters is the community and the survival of the resource, not its indulgence. Several commons initiatives prove Hardin wrong in assuming that within the context of the commons, a splurge of resources will take place since free agents care only about themselves (the so-called "free-rider problem") (Hardin, 1968). The commons, on the other hand, introduce a different kind of "agent," an individual who cares about the "resource" and the very community developed around it: the commons.

A special idea stated in Bollier and Helfrich's book is the "freedom in connectedness," the fact that "we are always connected to nature, other people, communities, and institutions" (Bollier and Helfrich, 2019: 80). Moreover, individuals in connectedness form certain political and organizational structures that perpetuate the life of the commons. Although the literature regarding the commons shows a distinction between approaches to its political character (Papadimitropoulos, 2017), the ultimate aim of all these approaches is the exceedance of neoliberal ontology, anthropology, economics, and politics.

Several assumptions regarding the ethical implementation of the political character of the commons can be traced. The fact that the commons (meaning the resource and the community shaped around it) forms a specific "common good," which combines political theory and ethics, is profound—an element also highlighted by Vicente Moreno-Casas and Philipp Bagus (2021). The common good within the commons context is the perpetuation of the resource through specific actions governed by responsibility and respect. A commons cannot exist without the resource. However, the relation to the resource is not the only feature implying ethics within the commons initiatives.

Political organization among people in such a way for a finite resource to survive over time implies a much elaborated ethical background. How can an individual be named a "peer" if not through a specific relation with others? This relation is an ethical bond forged by the respect and love for the resource. A bottom-up democratic organization governed by freedom of speech and immediacy would be implausible without the forging of collective and mutual rules and boundaries regarding ethical principles.

A crucial political and organizational element of the commons is the formation of a certain "system" for resolving conflicts. As Bollier and Helfrich state: "[T]here must be an honest, transparent reckoning of conflict or violation, but also a spirit of respect and concern for all the people involved. […] it is important to rectify the harm, but also to honor the dignity of the person" (Bollier and Helfrich, 2019: 113). The word "dignity" crystallizes my argument: the very formation of a commons (meaning the establishment of rules and norms around a specific resource) is an ethical action, besides being political. Of much importance for the commons and its political project is the way people treat each other. Thus, it could be deduced that one of the cores of the commons is ethics. If others are treated as mere means for the actualization of aims, then the overall political proposal of the commons falls apart.

Despite being a political and economic approach, the commons can offer several instances from which a cogent ethics can be developed. Organizational structures and economic models cannot exclusively define the relation between peers and the constitution of notions such as "collaborative finance," "convivial tools," "enlivenment," "peer governance," and many more. A certain ethical approach seems to be hidden behind the need to freely connect to others and nature that determines the essence and the political character of the commons.

URBAN COMMONS AND THE ETHICAL RIGHT TO THE CITY

Urban commons attempt to redefine urban spaces: from closed technical articulations for architects and engineers to an open and continuous process of urban transformations. For some scholars, "The urban commons

are the locus of convergence between the digital commons of knowledge and culture and the material reorganization of post-capitalist modes of production and exchange" (Bauwens et al., 2019: 59). It is clear that urban commons are of much importance for the broader commons project: cities are the places where everyone (even commoners) lives and acts. The first and foremost space where human self, norms, actions, possibilities, and skills are shaped is cities. Thus, the collective and democratic transformation of the technical orientations and infrastructures of a city is located at the heart of urban commons initiatives.

The concept of the transformation of urban infrastructures was not conceived within the contexts of the commons but already existed before; it originates in the work of Henri Lefebvre (1968) and Christopher Alexander (1977). Since then, several architects and sociologists have pursued the idea of altering urban foundations, with Pablo Sendra and Richard Sennett being some of the most prominent ones (2020). While these projects and ideas may raise awareness on issues concerning the possibilities a city offers and the way humans are developed in urban environments, they do not engage in matters of political organization, oppose specific socio-political values and systems, and/or create new political meanings. These are features posed by urban commons initiatives.

Urban Commons are considered the vehicle of transformation towards a commons world (Bauwens and Niaros, 2017). In the urban commons literature, the concept of the "co-city" can be located, adequately describing such initiatives. The infrastructure and the possibilities an actualized "co-city" offers are completely opposed to the values inscribed in the technical specifications of smart cities, such as control, top-bottom hierarchies, predictability, and calculability of possible human actions (Perperidis, 2023).

A co-city does not imply a regression to previous technical levels but rather a widening of participant interests that shape a city's form, akin to open-source technology. A city can be both sustainably "green" and technologically advanced without embedding the values of calculability, profit, and control. In a co-city, human experience is not digitized nor perceived as a finite resource to be extracted. A co-city can be technically advanced without rendering human communication and citizens' actions as mere data.

As Sheila Foster and Christian Iaione argue in their paper "The City as a Commons" (2016: 334), "the city is a commons by virtue of its openness and potential for rivalry". This kind of rivalry regarding the use and organizing of the commons within the city, and thus the city as commons, is initially a rivalry of meanings, implementing different interpretations of cities' design. In a co-city, the urban environment is co-designed (Iaione, 2017). This means

that, as they put it: "In an urban collaborative democracy, the logic should be a collaborative logic based on the development of shared norms and shared goals. This logic is focused on collaborative decision-making and collaborative design, both processes tasked with the identification of common goals, means to achieve those goals, and the mechanisms by which to share roles and responsibilities in their implementation" (Foster and Iaione, 2016: 337).

It is profound that a different urban design, one that is collaboratively constructed as a notion and in reality, brings forward an innovative context for every relation that will take place. Thus, in the context of urban commons, or in other words, in the context of user-centered peer production, the city and all its resources are treated with respect and not toward abundance (which would lead to the depletion of the resource). Thus said, people care about their resources and collaboratively develop ways to live around and with them.

The ethical presuppositions of urban commons initiatives are profound. Altering a city's infrastructure to democratize it and include even more social groups in its horizon of possible and viable actions indicates a kind of altruism for all those individuals who do not count as "citizens". Commoners wishing to install benches or construct low-cost DIY houses, such as those in the Wikihouse project (Bauwens et al., 2019: 23), bear in mind the housing problem in certain countries of the world and thus homelessness. DIY houses or altered urban infrastructures do not transform a city into a mega-center for tourism or for profit but into an inclusive and livable space for all.

Moreover, it seems that the "right to the city," as expressed by Lefebvre and later introduced in the concept of commons initiatives by Iaione (2017), is always an "ethical right to the city". Cities need to be open for everyone and reflect the values of every social group living there. The existence of marginalized groups within urban spaces and being perceived as inferior reflects an "unethical" city. Values such as dignity, self-sufficiency, and morality are bound together and embedded in an open urban design expressed by urban commons initiatives.

ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS AND ENERGY COMMONS

Environmental and energy commons might be the dimension of peer-to-peer networks closest to ethics. The importance of nature (finite resources of the earth) and its perpetuation for current and future commoners to thrive is the utmost goal of a commons. Moreover, a deep communion with nature lies in the background of the commons (Bollier and Helfrich, 2019: 111), rendering this

approach an environmental theory for future generations. The commons perceive the environment not as a mere space on which individuals may perform their socio-economic transactions but rather as a living organism alongside others within the "commonverse" (Bollier and Helfrich, 2019: 76) or, in other words, within the relational ontology they constitute (Bollier and Helfrich, 2019: 41).

Environmental and energy commons approach the environment through an important concept that needs clarification: the concept of degrowth. This concept sheds light on sustainable solutions for the environment and the prosperity of communities in a much healthier and environmentally friendly planet.

The notion of degrowth was developed as a radical critique of growth ideologies in economics and political theory. As Giorgos Kallis and his associates state: "[D]egrowth is a new term that signifies radical political and economic reorganization leading to drastically reduced resource and energy throughput" (Kallis et al., 2018). In a broad sense, it can be argued that degrowth aims for efficiency in a different context than that elaborated by capitalistic growth: the goal is not abundance and over-exploitation of resources for producing even more goods. On the contrary, degrowth's "efficiency" operates within the context of the "good life," meaning that this concept does not aim to produce the same amount of goods in a different way; but rather, to alter the way something is produced (both economically and ecologically) while simultaneously altering the very needs of communities— or in other words, "reducing a society's throughput" (social and anthropological aim) (Kallis et al., 2018: 293). "Good life" is a "green" and ecological way of living, which can be attained through degrowth.

Although degrowth economics is of much importance (Boillat et al., 2012; Georgescu-Roegen, 2011; Fournier, 2008), I am going to focus more here on the social, anthropological, and historical dimensions of the degrowth project. Historically, degrowth emerged as a contradiction to growth economic projects and their transformation into a kind of "green growth" (Kallis et al., 2018). The green character of growth, achieved by replacing dependence on fossil fuels with "greener" techniques such as solar power, seems to be just a distraction since growth is in need of fossil fuels to increase productivity and productive outcomes. In other words, the need for economic and productive growth, as this ideology was developed within the 20th century, cannot be "green" or respect the environment because it depends on the over-exploitation of Earth's resources to intensify growth (Hickel and Kallis, 2019). The emergence of resistance to growth couldn't happen in the context of merely transforming a few elements of growth.

Degrowth was developed as an answer to the ever-increasing exploitation and annihilation of resources, accompanied by specific economic development and certain liberal policymaking in regards to profit. It is clear, though, that degrowth does not impose economic instability (Lange, 2018). In relation to politics, degrowth stands for a democratic revision not only of policies but moreover of human needs and creativity (Kallis et al., 2018: 306).

The welfare state, along with neoliberal policies and capitalistic markets, has reduced human beings and citizens to mere customers. This reduction intensifies the need for even more growth in the form of produced goods governed by exchange value. In this respect, degrowth thinkers imagine "a socio-ecological transformation that forges new forms of democracy guided by (global) social and environmental justice, solidarity, and autonomy" (Kallis et al., 2018: 307; Asara et al., 2015; Cattaneo et al., 2012).

Degrowth is a project carried out by commons initiatives focusing on energy. Social scientists and commoners have sought ways to criticize state or privately-owned renewable energy development due to its focus on profit and dispossession techniques (Siamanta, 2021). Within the context of the commons, importance is given to the "commonification" of renewable energy, meaning the creation of a common value system through it (Giotitsas et al., 2020), and not simply a change in ownership or places of installation. Commoning renewable energy imposes a different epistemological status on energy: "energy is treated [or we could argue 'perceived'] not as a commodity but as a physical necessity for living systems" (Giotitsas et al., 2022). Energy commons and communities seem to be the vehicles through which the degrowth project can be attained.

I argue that the degrowth project and energy commons have a strong ethical background that needs highlighting. Both the deepening communion with nature and the need to commonify energy for a commons value system to surface stand in accordance with the principles of Deep Ecology ethical theory (Witoszek and Mueller, 2017). According to deep ecology, it is not the ownership or the mode of production that needs to change, but rather the way humans perceive nature—altering from nature as a resource to nature as inherently invaluable. This environmental approach is rendered as an Ethics combined with intergenerational ethics (Gardiner, 2014; 2022). Energy commoners care not only for themselves but also for future generations and the environment they will have to face. Thus, it could be argued that deep ecological and intergenerational ethics are located at the core of energy commons and the degrowth project. The element that

differentiates the commons from the aforementioned philosophical approaches is the former's focus on the political essence of this kind of transformation.

MAKERSPACES AND THE RESPONSIBLE PRODUCTION OF TECHNICAL ARTIFACTS

There is no single definition that perfectly captures the notion of a makerspace. For the purpose of this essay, I adopt the notion of a makerspace as "a community-run physical place where people can utilize local manufacturing technologies—namely, 3D Printers, computerized numerical control routers, and laser cutters (i.e., hi-techs), or simple cutting tools and screwdrivers (low-techs)" (Niaros et al., 2017). Thus, we can identify two basic characteristics of makerspaces: on the one hand, they are governed by the community that constitutes them; on the other hand, they develop, use, and maintain local manufacturing technologies.

Makerspaces within the commons context constitute places where people can gather and collaboratively socialize while exercising their creativity. The tools that a makerspace acquires are the outcome of community contributions. All the members of the commons that are based on a makerspace have access to such tools, while decision-making within a makerspace happens democratically on the basis of autonomy. Thus, it can be argued that such commons-based makerspaces operate in the "liminal zone between the monetized and non-monetized economies. They de-emphasize competition and promote cooperation and sharing at both immaterial and material levels, at both global and local scales" (Johanisova et al., 2013).

It appears that makerspaces create the space needed for informal community activity to take place, as well as a learning environment focusing on developing various capabilities and the knowledge of commoners (Niaros et al., 2017). Thus, makerspaces can be considered educational spaces. This is due to the fact that people can assess problems and collectively attempt to resolve them by learning the elements and assets of technical artifacts. Moreover, they learn to cooperate with others (peers) and construct relationships that are not hierarchically oriented nor exercise power. Lastly, in makerspaces, every commoner takes on a leadership role in projects, a feature that develops decisiveness and self-confidence (Sheridan et al., 2014: 529).

Another important feature of makerspaces is innovation, as the production of technologies is not perceived as returning to previous technological regimes, but rather as moving forward to new ones (Robra et al., 2023). People in makerspaces innovate by producing artifacts and then sharing the "blueprints" on the web for others to access

(a practice that actualizes "cosmolocalism," which I am going to discuss in the remaining part of this section). As Niaros et al. state: "in makerspaces, designers can come together and collaborate in participatory explorations during the use phase by prototyping, adding small-scale interventions" (2017: 6). This practice leads to exceeding a kind of "design-in-the-studio" strategy of the capitalistic enterprise for a "design-in-use" tactic that penetrates the commons (Seravalli, 2012).

To outline the concept of a makerspace, the notion of "cosmolocalism" needs clarification. The concept of cosmolocalism emerged with the advent of digital communications (Schismenos et al., 2020). In essence, cosmolocalism describes methods to create a shared resource network among local communities that coexist and co-create together (Kostakis et al., 2016). The connectivity that cosmolocal practices provide goes beyond place-oriented communities by creating different paths for information sharing. As Kostakis et al. highlight: "[P]ractically, cosmolocalism offers the framework for localizing collaborative forms of production while sharing resources in the form of digital commons globally" (2023: 2311). Makerspaces and technical commons initiatives draw on a global pool of knowledge to produce tools locally, adding their own contributions to the initial blueprint. They then upload these blueprints globally, allowing everyone access to the locally developed information and techniques.

The significance of the digital condition for cosmolocalism is profound. Knowledge and artifact production of this kind cannot operate without a free and democratic network for sharing information. This is the essence of the digital commons: the global community shaped around information, practices, and methods generated from the local experiences of individuals and then shared online for everyone. This is the reason behind the proliferation of initiatives concerning access to the internet itself. The online network, which is rendered as a "commons pool resource," reflects the "cosmo" of cosmolocalism. The other part of this notion is the "local". The local dimension of cosmolocalism can take many forms, from urban initiatives to change a neighborhood, a square, or even a whole town, to creating agricultural, bionic, or even space technologies in fab labs. For the purpose of this presentation, I choose to refer to the latter because makerspaces and fab labs are the commons initiatives within which new technological mechanisms and artifacts are being created.

Makerspaces within the context of cosmolocal practice ought not to be seen as mere organizational or socio-economic alternatives. The relations constructed within such spaces are initially ethical. People gathering

in one place and working together to oppose certain political systems share common ethical principles. Peer networks developed within makerspaces are governed by the values of respect for the work of others and reciprocity. Teamwork and appreciation for the work provided by other commoners prevail in such spaces. Moreover, certain ethical rules and norms surface in makerspaces regarding the use of tools (respect for the materiality of things and their finite existence) and the formation of human teams. Education taking place within a makerspace (Kostakis et al., 2015b) also raises ethical awareness. Non-specialists and/or younger people are not perceived as ignorant individuals who come to a makerspace to learn from specialists, thus avoiding rendering them as "subordinated". On the contrary, non-specialists and specialists are perceived altogether as peers. The ethical principles that govern their relation culminate in perceiving every human being as equal and as a bearer of certain ethical features that need to be respected. Apart from the ethical principles that penetrate human-to-human relations, the mid-tech technologies (Kostakis et al., 2023) produced within a makerspace bear a certain morality due to their open-source and free-for-distribution nature. Since everyone becomes a stakeholder in the production of technologies, these technical artifacts embody the ethical principles of a broader number of people. Thus, even fewer individuals are marginalized by the use of a certain technology, rendering such technologies ethical.

In this respect, the commons seem to be grounded in another, more recent development in ethics, which concerns technologies. Through the processes and actions taking place within makerspaces, it could be argued that commons initiatives in relation to technology can be connected with "ethics by design" (Dignum, V. et al., 2018; Brey and Dainow, 2023). This approach suggests that ethical values can be predetermined and translated into design requirements for the technology produced to be more ethical. This kind of ethics is completely related to a certain philosophy of technology that argues technologies are not neutral but incorporate values and are always biased toward the interests of the social groups or individuals that designed them (Feenberg, 2002; 2010; 2017; Verbeek, 2006; 2011). Thus, it could be argued that the way technical artifacts are designed in makerspaces of the commons reflects the ethics by design principles, as commoners elaborate on the values that are incorporated within artifacts to design them in a just and non-marginalizing way. In this respect, technologies produced in commons makerspaces have materialized the morality of commoning, of bottom-up organization, and of peer connectivity.

TOWARDS AN ETHICS OF THE COMMONS

Previous parts of this essay indicate that the commons pose ethical questions, challenging the established ethical assumptions of neoliberalism. The task of ethical and political philosophers today would be to indicate the way towards a cogent ethics concerning the commons. Thus, in this final part of the essay, I am going to evaluate the commons not in terms of political philosophy and morality, i.e., in relation to the concept of the "common good"—which is highlighted in several instances (Peredo et al., 2020; Mazzucato, 2023)—but in terms of ethics. Thus, I will not indulge in writing regarding individualization and social contract (Hobbes, Locke) or whether the commons constitute some kind of "physical condition" (Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Rawls), etc. Here I will attempt to develop an ethics for the commons through philosophers who developed concrete work on ethics, such as Aristotle and Immanuel Kant.

As argued throughout the previous parts of this essay, the commons practice is based on specific ethical values that are reflected in organizational and political aspects of its development. The foundation of the constitution of peer networks is to perceive other human beings as peers and equivalents. To be able to do so, commoners need to embrace the *Other* not as mere means of achieving organizational, economic, or political aims, but moreover as a living person with a unique personality and common emotions. On this basis, we could argue that within the context of the commons, perceiving the *Other* as a fellow commoner with shared characteristics and mutual respect is by itself an ethical act. Peer networks are, by principle, ethical networks, where equals respect one another and the environment around them, aiming at prospering together. All of the norms and habits commoners co-create in accordance with the rules of the community can be said to be governed by a certain commons ethics.

To justify the above-mentioned argument, a certain account drawn from the field of Ethics can be utilized. We could argue that the commons initiatives develop a kind of hybrid ethics: they combine the principles of a deontological normative approach (Kant) with those of the moral virtue approach (Aristotle). The deontological approach, initially developed by Immanuel Kant, holds that there is a certain logical rule—the categorical imperative (Kant, 1981: 30)—for the evaluation of an act's morality. If the act follows the logical principle expressed in the categorical imperative, then this act can be said to be moral. The deontological approach sets a specific moral obligation: a duty (Baron, 1997). For this approach, the consequences of an action are of no significance; the only thing that matters is following the duty which, for Kant,

was indicated by pure logic. In the context of the commons where duty is collaboratively generated through common practices such as developing grassroots technical artifacts, reshaping aspects of a neighborhood and taking care of common resources, it is not the absurd law of Logic that creates the moral obligation but the collaboration and mutual respect between participants. This is the reason the common practices analyzed in the previous parts of this paper are essentially ethical: they create a moral obligation and ethical stance just by aiming at the mutual sustainability of nature and people.

On the other hand, stands the theory of moral virtues and of an excellent character initially developed by the renowned Greek philosopher of ancient times, Aristotle (Aristotle, 1962; Hursthouse 1999; Driver, 2007). According to him, morality can be acquired through the habituations (hexis) of making right and just choices. In this way, an individual constitutes an ethos of rightfulness and morality, which helps them make the right and moral choice every time they come across a moral dilemma. A human of virtue is an individual who has achieved hexis and is able to choose moral and rightful actions after critical thinking. Hexis within the commons practices are community-driven in a way that generates feelings of respect, altruism and dedication to the community. Each commoner in an urban commons cares about the neighborhood and the town or city because they care about other people's abilities to participate in urban activities. Acts taking place in this context have been rationally chosen by individuals who have developed a kind of moral self through their constant actions to contribute to the community. Democratically designing new technical artifacts in makerspaces according to everyone's experience or caring for the environment in order for current and future generations to thrive creates a moral self which continuously acts on the virtue of care, respect and mutuality.

As I argued before, the commons seem to combine the above-mentioned approaches of Ethics into a hybrid theory of Ethics. This is due to the fact that within commons initiatives, certain rules are constituted which are then followed by the commoners. Such rules may not have the epistemological background of Kantian theory, but they surface on the autonomy and self-governance of the community. Then, the actions of each and every member of the community are evaluated in accordance with the rules constituted, making an individual "good" or "bad" respectively.

On the other hand, and in addition to the rules constituted by the community and followed by each member, a certain hexis is developed by each one in regards to rightful and moral actions. Since the rules are constituted autonomously and through bottom-up processes, each commoner contributes actively to shaping them. This means that for a commons initiative to exist, certain moral habits need to have been chosen by individuals for a community rule to be constituted. Thus, for example, in regards to degrowth and the ethics for the environment, no community (commons) with respect for the environment (rule) can emerge if individuals don't actively and habitually act with respect for the environment (individual virtue).

This does not mean that individual morality is shaped outside or before the formation of the rules. Rather, they constitute an entangled hierarchy: one could not tell which one was initially shaped. They are co-created, like everything in the commons universe. An initial sensitivity towards the environment or towards a political reform is shaped by the community norms while at the same time determines it.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this essay, I attempted to outline multiple ethical pathways that may be employed for an Ethics of the commons to emerge. In this attempt, I avoided referring to the "common goods" approach to examine other philosophical possibilities that may operate as ethical foundations for the commons. My initial assumption was that since every political theory and philosophy stresses issues of Ethics—Thomas Hobbes and the morality developed within the state; John Locke and the moral status of liberty; Rousseau and the morality of human nature; John Rawls and his theory of moral justice and fairness; Corine Pelluchon and the ethics of vulnerability, etc.—it is necessary for the commons to begin highlighting the ethical principles and implications of their political and socio-economic approaches and practices. In the parts wherein I scrutinize diverse facets of the commons, my endeavor is to integrate their fundamental constituents with a spectrum of ethical theories derived from disparate philosophical paradigms. This synthesis is aimed at aligning with the nuanced nature of the commons. The distinctiveness of this methodology becomes apparent, as it seeks to establish a connection between Ethics and the commons—a linkage hitherto unexplored in extant literature.

More research needs to be done in connection to specific details of commons initiatives. In this paper, I indicated some of the most renowned ethical approaches such as Kantian deontological ethics, Aristotelian virtue ethics, Ethics by design, and intergenerational ethics, to stress the way the commons might be related to such approaches in the field of Ethics. More ethical theories can be examined in accordance with the commons, such as Ethics derived from Eastern philosophies: Ubuntu, Buddhism, Mitakuye Oyasin of the Lakota tribe, and

more. The commons literature and practices may benefit from the development of an Ethics of the commons in connecting theory and practice more tightly. Ethics can provide a guiding context for acting within the commons, generated by the very collaborative practices taking place in it, aiming not at creating a fixed set of values or principles, but at accompanying actions and strengthening them on their way towards achieving their political goal. By indicating the fallacies of the current socio-political milieu and its impact on Ethics, meaning the cultivation of individualism, self-interest, apathy and aloofness for others, the Ethics of the commons can open up new ways of opposing neoliberalism.

This paper aims to be a road sign. More research needs to be done for the ethical foundations of the commons to be thoroughly developed. The idea of a hybrid deontological-virtue ethics is original and needs to be applied and validated through case studies within specific contexts of the commons. Certain moral obligations deriving from collective action need to be noted and tested throughout communities in accordance with the actions (hexis) of commoners. Moreover, the morality of specific contexts of the commons needs to be studied more thoroughly: which ethical principles do certain actions within an urban commons promote? Or how does a specific artifact created in a makerspace reflects mutuality, common respect or openness? Examining such questions in specific contexts will help the commons literature and practices develop self-awareness of the possibilities the commons may open up. Moreover, by answering such questions philosophically, the commons may become even more strengthened as a concrete and viable alternative to the current socio-economic and political system.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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